

500 hospital jobs go to save £50m

By Alan Jones, PA
Thursday, 17 February 2011

Union leaders today attacked announcements of cutbacks at two hospitals which they said would lead to the loss of almost 1,000 jobs and the closure of wards.

Unison said 500 jobs would be axed at St George's Hospital in Tooting, south London, while a further 486 were under threat at Kingston Hospital in south-west London.

General secretary Dave Prentis said: "This is a terrible day for patients in London, who have found out they stand to lose nearly 1,000 health workers. This nails the lie that the frontline will be protected - more than 200 nurses at Kingston will lose their jobs."

Unison said Kingston's Liberal Democrat MP Ed Davey and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg both used the hospital as a backdrop during their election campaigns, asking: "Where are they when we need their support?"

St George's Hospital said it was not immune from the financial challenges facing the NHS, revealing it needed to achieve £55 million of savings this year, although it would not speculate on the number of likely job losses.

"St George's Healthcare is not immune from the financial challenges currently facing the wider NHS and we have been open with staff and unions about the need to achieve £55 million savings during 2011/12.

"The trust is a major trauma centre, hyper-acute stroke unit and centre of excellence for cancer, cardiac and women's and children's services and we are committed to providing quality care to our patients. We cannot speculate at this stage on the exact number, or nature, of posts that will need to go but we hope to avoid the need for any compulsory redundancies. With this in mind we have already put in place a recruitment freeze and are stopping the use of agency staff."

A spokesman for Kingston Hospital NHS Trust said: "We expect the reduction of these 486 posts over five years to be managed as part of natural staff turnover, as on average, we see between 300 and 400 staff leave the trust each year.

"We are in the process of applying to become an NHS Foundation Trust. As part of our application, we have to put together a long-term plan, which shows how we are going to manage with 25% less money, over the next five years. Other NHS trusts who are applying to be Foundation Trusts are in the same position.

"We have put together a five-year plan, which shows where we expect the 25% reduction in costs to come out. As with any long-term plan of this kind, a loss of some posts is to be expected, however we

expect these to be absorbed as part of natural staff turnover. These plans have been put together at divisional level, by clinical teams."

Mr Prentis said of the Kingston cuts: "Tory claims to be the party of the NHS are nothing but a sham - how is this hospital supposed to keep on running with 20% fewer staff?"

"The job cuts are a direct result of the Government's plans to hand over funding to GPs, so this deeply worrying pattern of hospital job cuts will be repeated across the country."

Nora Pearce, Unison's representative at Kingston Hospital, said: "This is terrible news for staff and for people living in Kingston. All through the election we were told that the health service would not suffer frontline cuts - but now my hospital is set to lose more than 200 nurses. This Government is ripping the heart out of the NHS."

Jane Pilgrim, a nurse at St George's, said: "This is a sad day for staff. We were told by the Government that there would be no cuts in frontline posts but in reality the NHS is witnessing swingeing cuts to frontline services every day."

Geoff Martin, of pressure group Health Emergency, said: "In the first few weeks of this year more than 5,000 health workers' jobs have been axed up and down the country with the threat of much worse to come as trusts look to implement £20 billion in cuts."

Meanwhile the GMB union said job losses at Wiltshire County Council will reach 450 under additional cuts to be formally announced at the end of the month.

More than 200 extra redundancies and unfilled posts will be announced as a result of cuts in government grants, said the union.

The GMB said over 160,000 jobs have been axed or threatened by councils across Britain in recent months.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority announced it was cutting 170 jobs because it had to make "swingeing" savings after having its Government grant reduced by 13%.

The authority said it will freeze staff pay for three years, cut £2.4 million from management and back-office costs, and make efficiencies.

Firefighter reductions will be achieved over three years through not replacing people when they retire, said the authority, adding that an enhanced voluntary severance and retirement offer will avoid compulsory redundancies among non-uniform staff.

Chief fire officer Tony McGuirk said: "The Government cuts are unprecedented and will have an impact on an organisation which has led the way in making the service more successful and efficient over the last decade.

"80% of our costs are staff-related so it is impossible to make savings of this size without impacting on jobs. Our focus has to be on maintaining frontline services".

Tony Newman, chairman of the fire authority, said: "The size of Government cuts means that job losses are unavoidable but we will be doing everything we can to mitigate the effect on individual staff while maintaining frontline services."

Merseyside Police Authority later announced it had to make savings of £61.4 million over the next four years because of "severe cuts" to Government funding.

A freeze on police officer recruitment will continue, meaning an estimated loss of 380 police officers by the end of the financial year.

"If suggested options for future cuts go ahead, there will also be a total reduction in police staff of around 163 by the end of the 2011/12 financial year," said the authority.

Bill Weightman, chairman of Merseyside Police Authority, said: "Today's budget is both challenging and painful, particularly considering all we have done in recent years to increase police officer numbers, reduce crime and increase public confidence. We are dealing with the quickest and deepest cuts in living memory so our job now is to protect frontline services as much as possible and keep listening to the people of Merseyside to make sure we've got our priorities right."