

Health services have been on everyone's mind recently, with stories of NHS and GP pressures making headlines and causing significant worry for lots of us. A few weeks ago I wrote here of my concern about the NHS in particular, and my support for staff who have been forced to take strike action for better pay and conditions.

Nurses have once again been taking action this week, and last week half a million keyworkers went on strike including many teachers. My own children will be affected by the strikes, but each and every teacher taking part has my full support. I want my children to be educated by well paid and respected staff in properly funded and resourced schools.

We all need to do what we can to fight for better conditions and better services. It's in all our interests.

In the debate on health services, social care is often mentioned as part of the solution to relieving pressure in hospitals. Care workers do an incredible job and like their colleagues in the NHS they deserve better pay and conditions too, and there is no doubt the social care system has a part to play in supporting people to leave hospitals as soon as they are well enough to do so. But social care plays such a huge role in our communities and it's wrong to talk about it as if it's just some sort of magic pill to make the NHS problems go away.

In St Helens we're doing great work through St Helens Cares, our People's Board, and many other examples of effective partnership working. Cllr Marlene Quinn has led on this agenda for a number of years and other boroughs look to us as an example of outstanding practice.

Social care is funded via local government, and residents will be aware that for a number of years now the Government has been generating extra funding for it by encouraging councils to raise council tax by 2% - the so called 'social care precept'. But it can't be funded by council tax alone. The system nationally has an estimated £13billion funding shortfall.

Like the NHS, schools, police, fire and rescue and more, it needs fair funding if we're going to give keyworkers the pay they deserve and residents the services they expect.

Best wishes to all Star readers.