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The Gazette

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JOBS AND BEDS **AXED** IN HOSPITAL CUTS

ANOTHER NHS bombshell has exploded in Weston-super-Mare. Weston Area Health NHS Trust, which runs Weston General Hospital, is being forced to axe hospital beds and cut up to 60 jobs as part of £11million cuts cash.

The 60 job losses come on top of 29 posts axed last year. The cutbacks include reducing the six-bed bays on the surgical floor to four-bed bays and moving short stay care to the Kewstoke ward.

The number of beds in the rehabilitation unit will be reduced, with more patients being treated at Clevedon Hospital.

Local MP John Penrose said: "This is a disaster. Weston's hospital is already too small for the fast growing community that it serves.

"These cuts will cause huge damage. Once again, staff and patients are going to bear the brunt and I fear that services are going to suffer."

Mr Penrose confronted Tony Blair during Prime Minister's Question Time in Parliament.

He reminded the Prime Minister that Weston's hospital is one of the most efficient in the country, with costs 15% below government targets during the last two years. He blamed delays in the introduction of the new 'payment by results' funding system.

The funding system, where hospitals are paid per actual patient treated instead of getting an annual grant based on Whitehall estimates, would wipe out the trust's deficit in one year. An £11m under-funding of North Somerset primary care trust, is also to blame.

John asked, "Would the Prime Minister agree with me that this is not a problem created by local mismanagement, but rather a crisis which has been created by decisions made in Westminster? Will the Prime Minister intervene personally?"



Tony Blair responded that, in his view, the cuts to jobs and beds at Weston General Hospital would be "fully worth it" to improve health care in North Somerset.

But the Prime Minister agreed to personally intervene and examine the Weston MP's concerns that Department of Health delays are to blame for the crisis.

John has now invited the Prime Minister to visit Weston General Hospital to see at first hand how the health team are coping with £11million cuts.

He has also offered to organise a delegation of health professionals to visit Westminster to brief Tony Blair on the situ-

ation. John said, "I can't promise the Prime Minister a tickertape reception if he comes to Weston-super-Mare hospital.

"But if he's willing to think again about introducing pay-

'Come and see for yourself Prime Minister.'

ment by results it would stop the cuts and save nurses' jobs.

"Then he'd get a much more positive reception. I think people would respect him for investigating the matter at first hand rather than making key decisions on the future of Weston's NHS from the ivory towers of Westminster."



JOHN Penrose in the House of Commons



TONY Blair has agreed to personally examine John Penrose's concerns

John Penrose MP - Working for you all year round