WAKING UP THE MORNING AFTER

polling day, most expected to hear that no party had won a clear parliamentary majority. Commentators predicted another hung parliament, but voters proved themselves to be less predictable than those commentators had thought.

It was the first outright Conservative victory since 1992, with the party winning 12 more seats than all the other parties put together. So, what did people vote for? What were the policies on the NHS in the Conservative manifesto?

The law on strikes is set to change, affecting all parts of the UK. The Conservatives want to change the law so that any successful ballot leading to strike action in a public service like the NHS must see a turnout of at least 50% and any vote for strike action must have been endorsed by at least 40% of all eligible voters. On that basis, the recent votes for strike action by RCM members in England and Northern Ireland would have been invalid, despite very heavy ‘Yes’ votes, because neither had a turnout above 50%. We will need to fight attempts to take away from midwives, MSWs and others their right to strike if pushed to it by employers.

The party also committed itself to increasing the budget of the NHS in England by £8bn by 2020. That is in their manifesto and was repeated many times by senior party figures, including David Cameron and George Osborne, during the campaign. That is a positive. The party is committed to eliminating the budget deficit and running a surplus while cutting many taxes. This means public spending will have to be cut; that is unavoidable given their plans. By so explicitly committing to increase spending on the NHS by £8bn per year over and above inflation by 2020, the Conservatives are set to provide some protection to the health service that other parts of government do not have. The cuts elsewhere will have to be deep.

Additionally, the party’s manifesto does state that they ‘will ensure that women have access to mental health support during and after pregnancy’. All parties have spoken a lot about improving mental health care, so we hope to see improvements in what is an underfunded area of care.

One challenge they face is meeting their manifesto commitment to create ‘a truly seven day NHS’, with fully staffed hospitals every day of the week. Maternity units operate on that basis, of course, but scaling up services across the full range of hospital departments will require money, and what impact will that have on maternity care if everyone else’s budgets need to increase?

Changes to terms and conditions of NHS staff to enable seven-day services will also come into the Department of Health’s sights.

The changes to the NHS will apply only to England. The strike rule changes will apply across the UK. We will be lobbying and campaigning on all these issues over the coming months and years.