On politics

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Spending cuts and new manifestos

THE CONSERVATIVES WENT INTO THE last election promising to eliminate the deficit through cutting public spending, and, now elected, they are putting that into practice. We have already seen, for instance, the announcement that they will slash £200m from local councils’ public health budgets.

The RCM fears that this will have a damaging effect on important public health campaigns on obesity and smoking, which can impact on those using maternity services, as well as more directly relevant campaigns like breastfeeding. We believe that getting public health right can mean real savings in later years, and that these cuts are short-sighted and will end up with more money needing to be spent, not less. We hope this is not the start of a concerted campaign of cuts to public health and we will be vocal in opposing them.

While those of us in England can forget about electioneering and political campaigning for the moment, spare a thought for those outside of England. Before long, doors in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will be knocked on, telephones called and leaflets stuffed through letterboxes, as the parties limber up for elections to the Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales, and the Northern Ireland Assembly. With health a devolved matter outside England, the choices voters make will impact on the working lives of midwives and MSWs.

What is the RCM doing about it? We are going to be launching a manifesto for each part of the UK and asking parties and candidates to sign up to it. We did something similar at the general election and we saw every main political party support at least one of our manifesto priorities. We also found some new friends among those standing, with two-dozen of them elected to the House of Commons. Given that we lost some longstanding MPs who were happy to help our campaigning in parliament, it was a relief that some new friends made it into the Commons.

We have already spoken to midwives in Northern Ireland about what they would like to see from any post-election administration in Belfast, and we will be meeting midwives in Scotland and Wales soon, too. It is important that what we ask for in each manifesto reflects the issues most important to members locally, so if you live in either of those countries and want to let us know what you think, please email me at stuart.bonar@rcm.org.uk

Finally, the RCM has joined a newly-formed group in Scotland that brings together people working in health policy for organisations representing NHS staff. RCM director for Scotland Gillian Smith is already well involved in the health policy debate, but this will provide another route to keep in touch with issues as they arise and seek to work with our NHS staff groups to influence developments at the Scottish parliament and in the Scottish government.