AM: Were you surprised, were you disappointed not to hear more – or indeed anything – from Philip Hammond in the autumn statement about the NHS?
SD: Well, I was very disappointed not to hear, in particular, actually about social care. There’s an easy slogan headline here saying what we should be focused on is NHS funding. It’s actually Simon Stevens, the Chief Executive of NHS England, who said that if there was some spare money it needed to go into social care in order to create a more efficient health and social care system. A more balanced health and social care system. So in a – in an autumn statement where Philip Hammond was talking about the importance of productivity, I can think of no instance across public or private sector where a small investment by the government could have produced a bigger improvement in productivity through efficient use of the whole of the health and social care system. And indeed, that small investment in social care could have delivered significant improvements in the quality and efficiency of the whole health and social care system.

AM: So in clear terms, was it a mistake not to offer something? And what happens to the social care system if nothing is done?
SD: Well, the answer is that it was a mistake, in my view, not to make an investment in social care. The result of not making an investment in social care is, to put it in very simple terms, that needs that should be met by supporting people in their own homes or providing residential care end up in NHS hospitals. When we hear stories of full emergency admission wards, people not being discharged from hospital, full A&E departments, that is in part at least the result of failing to meet those demands through the social care system because it’s inadequately funded.
AM: I don’t know if you were able to hear Paul Mason suggesting that this would be a crisis that would dominate news for the next nine months or so, through social care and the NHS itself. But I suppose the question is, given that money is tight, we’re worried about public finances, can the government actually afford to do much about this?

SD: Well, all I’m doing is picking up Philip Hammond’s own rationale for investing in a productivity fund. Actually if you invest in social care, what you’re doing is improving the productivity of the whole health and social care system and improving the quality of those just about managing people who otherwise find their family budgets under incredible strain and personal worry because of failures in social care.

AM: Alright. Two things. Should Philip Hammond change tack and come back to the House of Commons and offer some more money first of all, and second, as a former Health Secretary yourself in a Tory government, don’t you think you’re being disloyal by attacking him publicly?

SD: Well, I think that one of the key attributes of being involved in any form of public life, and now as Chair of the NHS Confederation, is a willingness to speak truth unto power. And there is no good going into this winter saying it’s all going to be alright when we already have lengthening queues in A&E departments, we already have problems with hospitals unable to discharge people, because of inadequate provision of social care. Now, the easy headline is to say spend more money on the NHS. That’s not what we’re saying. What we’re saying is proper investment in the part of the system that isn’t working will actually deliver better value as well as better care.

AM: So should Philip Hammond come back to the House of Commons and do that?

SD: Well, my answer is twofold to that. First of all, yes he should. And secondly, he also, in the autumn statement – this is one of
the less-noticed bits – said that we need to start thinking about the structure of public expenditure going into the next parliament, because there’ll be some commitments that need to be reviewed at that time. It’s precisely for that reason that we, from the Confederation, on a cross-party basis, without Alan Milburn, one of my Labour successors as Health Secretary, and also Norman Lamb, who was the Health Minister in the coalition, from the Lib Dems, have argued that we need to look on a more long-term basis at these funding questions so we don’t get into this kind of short-term impending crisis.

(ends)