

Contact: Cllr John Robinson
Direct Tel: 03000 268140
e-mail:
Your ref:
Our ref:



The Path to Excellence South Tyneside
and Sunderland Consultation,
Freepost RTUS-LYHZ-BRLE,
North of England Commissioning Support,
Riverside House,
Goldcrest Way,
Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
NE15 8NY

9 October 2017

Dear Sir,

South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Partnership - Path to Excellence Consultation

I would like to thank the representatives of the South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Partnership for attending the special meeting of Durham County Council's Adults Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 September 2017 to discuss the statutory consultation being undertaken in respect of the proposed changes to stroke; maternity (obstetrics); women's healthcare (gynaecology) and children and young people's healthcare (urgent and emergency paediatrics).

Following consideration of the strategic context for the NHS, the Path to Excellence proposals and the impact upon County Durham patients, the Committee wish to make the following comments as their formal response to the statutory consultation.

Strategic context and rationale for change.

The Committee notes that the rationale for change is largely based upon two factors. Firstly, there are increasing workforce pressure across the NHS and which are being experienced within the South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Partnership. These relate to an insufficient number of senior staff being available to cover services on a 24/7 basis across multiple sites and which has led to an overreliance on locum staff at a higher cost. Secondly, royal colleges across health service professions have stressed the importance of having centres of excellence within which there is an optimum level of throughput in terms of patient numbers and procedures undertaken to ensure required

Members

Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham DH1 5UQ
Main Telephone (03000) 260000 Minicom (0191) 383 3802 Text 07786 02 69 56

standards of professional competencies are maintained. These in turn make such centres more attractive to potential new employees.

The Committee is concerned at the lack of robust workforce planning at a national level for which the Secretary of State for Health should bear some responsibility. Across the breadth of NHS Services, the Committee has consistently been advised that service change is necessary in order to address staffing shortages and enable viable shifts/rotas to be maintained. This must be addressed urgently. The Committee also believe that action should be taken at a local level by NHS Foundation Trusts and Clinical Commissioning Groups working with the region's Universities to examine how health professional qualifications can be made more attractive as a career choice.

General comments on the Path to Excellence Programme proposals

The Committee has received presentations earlier this year in respect of draft Sustainability and Transformation Plans that have been developed covering Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and North Durham (NTWND STP) footprint and the Durham, Darlington, Teesside, Hambleton, Richmondshire and Whitby (DDTHRW STP) footprint. In respect of the NTWND STP, the Committee has been advised that this was a series of pre-existing plans for service change, of which the Path to Excellence programme appears to be one such plan. Whilst acknowledging the work undertaken to date in respect of the programme, the Committee are concerned that service changes agreed under the Path to Excellence programme will be implemented without recourse to any potential impact upon other areas within the two STP footprints. Accordingly, the Committee would seek assurances that dialogue is taking place across STP boundaries and that any cross boundary implications of service changes are fully explored and mitigated against.

Members are also aware that frequently service changes within the NHS may have an impact upon local authority health and social care services and associated budgets. The Committee would seek assurances that appropriate dialogue takes place with affected local authorities including Durham County Council on any unintended consequences of any service changes agreed following the Path to Excellence programme consultation.

In terms of the potential impact of the Path to Excellence programme proposals on residents of County Durham, it appears that the options across all four service areas appear to favour centralisation on the Sunderland Royal Hospital site. As a consequence of this the Committee acknowledges that there should be little adverse impact upon the residents of County Durham.

Stroke Services

Whilst accepting that the number of County Durham residents treated for stroke within the Sunderland and South Tyneside is relatively small, there will be a

potential impact upon the local authority in terms of discharge planning arrangements post-acute treatment. It is therefore essential that whichever option is agreed, Durham County Council adult and social care staff are involved in any discharge planning processes subsequently developed.

The Committee notes the recent poor performance of South Tyneside District Hospital and Sunderland Royal Hospital in terms of their Sentinel Stroke National Audit report scores and welcomes the recent improvements that have been demonstrated following the temporary changes made to stroke services in January 2017 and which form the basis for the model proposed in Option 1.

During consideration of the stroke service proposals, there were concerns raised by the Committee that stroke service patients would continue to be triaged in A&E by specialist stroke staff rather than being directly admitted to a dedicated stroke ward (which the Committee is aware happens within County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust at University Hospital North Durham). The Committee would welcome assurances that whatever the model implemented, stroke patients would be admitted directly to a dedicated stroke ward/unit, bypassing A&E and ensuring that they receive the necessary treatment as quickly as possible.

The Committee appreciates that the centralisation of stroke services on a single site, whilst delivering better potential outcomes for patients, may result in increased travel times to services for some patients. The existing pressure upon the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) in terms of ambulance response times and transfer delays are well documented and known to the Committee. It is considered vital that the views of NEAS on the proposed options for stroke services are known and that any potential increase in ambulatory travel times are factored into the decision making process.

Proposed development of Durham Treatment Centre, Belmont

In November 2016, the Committee received information regarding the development of a Treatment Centre at Belmont Durham by Sunderland City Hospital's NHS FT which would provide services such as Renal services, Ophthalmology and Urology services to patients including County Durham residents. Whilst noting that these services are not part of the current Path to Excellence programme, the Committee seeks assurances that the proposed development will not be compromised in any future service reconfigurations.

Finally, the Committee requests that a further report detailing the results of the Path to Excellence consultation process be brought back to the Adults Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 19 January 2018 before a final decision is taken by South Tyneside and Sunderland CCGs.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Cllr John Robinson
Chair of the Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Durham County Council