

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

16 May 2007

SCRUTINY OF HEALTH COMMITTEE

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

Since County Council on 21 February 2007 the Committee has been extremely busy. We have had 4 extra meetings to consider a statutory consultation being promoted the Scarborough and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust, these meetings taking place over just 12 days !! Some of the Members who were involved in all these meetings, connected briefings and site visits (myself included) spent hours behind the wheel in driving well over 1000 miles to be in attendance at them, in addition to the time spent at the meetings.

A reliable and comfortable car, preferably with good in-car entertainment facilities, a liking for sandwiches on the move, and a personal disposition that includes patience appear to be pre-requisites of being a member of the Scrutiny of Health Committee!!

We also had a scheduled meeting of the Committee on Friday 27 April in Harrogate.

Statutory Consultation by the Scarborough and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust

- a) Maternity Services at Malton, Whitby and Bridlington Community Hospitals
- b) Future role of Bridlington Community Hospital

Between December 2006 and March 2007 the Scrutiny of Health Committee has been involved in statutory public consultations run by the Scarborough and North East Yorkshire (SNEY) NHS Trust on maternity services and the future role of Bridlington Community Hospital. The first consultation proposed the cessation of the 'home from home' birthing service the SNEY Trust provides at Whitby, Malton and Bridlington Community Hospitals, and the second consultation looking at the future of services at Bridlington Community Hospital more generally.

In responding to the consultations the Scrutiny of Health Committee held meetings on 1 March 2007 and 12 March 2007 in **Whitby (200 members of the public in attendance)** and **Malton (70 members of the public in attendance)** respectively and participated in a Joint Scrutiny of Health Committee with the East Riding of Yorkshire Council which met on 26 February 2007 and 7 March 2007 in Bridlington.

The official response of the NYCC Scrutiny of Health Committee to the consultations was to support the option to continue the 'home from home' birthing service at Whitby and Malton Community Hospitals. If this was not the option supported by the Board of the SNEY NHS Trust then the Committee resolved to refer the proposal to the Secretary of State for Health on the grounds that it was not in the interest of the health services provided for the local communities.

The official response of the North Yorkshire County Council / East Riding of Yorkshire Joint Scrutiny of Health Committee to the consultations was to support the option to

continue the 'home from home' birthing service, along with the coronary care unit and various acute services at Bridlington Community Hospital. If these were not the options supported by the Board of the SNEY NHS Trust then the Joint Committee resolved to refer the proposals to the Secretary of State for Health on the grounds that they were not in the interest of the health services provided for the local communities.

At its Board meeting on 6 April 2007 the Board of the SNEY NHS Trust decided to defer its decisions on the major proposals contained in the public consultation until its meeting in June 2007. I was invited as the Chairman of the NYCC Scrutiny of Health Committee to address the Board at this meeting. It has implemented the proposal to extend the services offered at Minor Injuries Unit at Bridlington Community Hospital but this had the full support of the Joint Scrutiny Committee.

In part the deferral was, according to the papers that went to the Board, due to the "overwhelming weight of responses" from members of the public which the NHS Trust had not yet had the time to consider by the date of the Board meeting.

The NYCC Scrutiny of Health Committee considered the engagement of the SNEY NHS Trust in this statutory public consultation exemplary, and a good example of how to properly involve the public that NHS Trusts across the country who have to conduct these consultations might be well advised to follow.

However the Committee was less complimentary about the evidence provided in the consultation document and the subsequent presentations made to it by the key officers of the Trust.

It considered the underlying driver for the proposals was financial (there would be an annual saving of £400,000 and the SNEY NHS Trust is over £7 million in debt) although this was stoutly denied by Iain McInnes, Chief Executive of the Trust, who argued it was on grounds of safety. The Committee however concluded that the evidence produced on safety was unconvincing to say the least, and it was bizarre that the Trust should play the safety card to stop births at its Community Hospitals, but continue to promote births at home, which it argued were as equally unsafe as those in its Hospitals !!

The Committee recognised that all 3 Community Hospitals are held in very high esteem by the local people they serve, the 'home from home' birthing service at the Hospital was a highly valued service, and the proposal to stop the service was a restriction on choice. It was also concerned that the impact of vacancy freeze at the SNEY Trust was a shortage of midwives on the staff roll. Those midwives that remained were frequently directed to Scarborough District General Hospital, and when they were the 'home from home' birthing service was often suspended at the Community Hospitals.

There was a tide of anger amongst the public at the Malton meeting, and the Committee was distinctly unhappy as well, when it was casually revealed during the course of the meeting that the 'home from home' birthing service and the birth at home service had been suspended for 2 weeks that very day due to the need for midwives to bolster the maternity service at Scarborough Hospital.

It is the very first time in over 3 years that the Scrutiny of Health Committee has threatened to use its powers to refer the proposals to the Secretary of State for Health. You will note from the above that the joint Committee with the East Riding of Yorkshire Council also threatened to use this power with regard to Bridlington Community Hospital.

If this power is invoked then it means the SNEY Trust cannot implement its proposals and instead the Secretary of State for Health will review them. The outcome of this review is not a foregone conclusion. It could be to continue the 'home from home' birthing service at any or all of the 3 Community Hospitals. Or it could also be to give the SNEY Trust permission to implement its proposals.

Adding a final ironic twist to this was the announcement on 6 April 2007, the day of the SNEY Board meeting, of new Government choice guidelines for mothers-to-be. The minimum choice in England from 2009 will be (1) in a consultant led unit at a General or Specialist Hospital (2) at home and (3) wait for it, in a community setting under the care of a midwife such as a local Community Hospital !!

There is a scent of victory here for the hundreds of local people who demonstrated with their feet just how important it is to them to see services maintained at their local Community Hospitals. Much of the credit will be due to their visible and vocal resistance to the proposals along with their written submissions during the statutory consultation if the 'home from home' birthing service is saved at Malton, Whitby and Bridlington Community Hospitals.

I think the Scrutiny of Health Committee, along with the Yorkshire Coast and Moors and the Ryedale Area Committees, and the East Riding of Yorkshire Scrutiny of Health Committee, can also rightly claim some credit for raising the profile of the proposals in the statutory consultation and providing a platform for the voice and the views of local people to be heard. This has been an example of engagement with the public at the very highest level.

It is an understatement to say that in the communities of Whitby, Malton and Bridlington, and their hinterlands, that the final outcome of the consultation is eagerly awaited. I will report further on this in my Statement to the July County Council.

The future of services at Whitby Community Hospital

The Scrutiny of Health Committee has for long shared the concern of local people in Whitby and its hinterland that services at its Community Hospital have been under threat. In January 2006 the Committee held a meeting to discuss these issues which 275 members of the public attended. We promised to return as a Committee to review the latest situation and the occasion of the statutory consultation on maternity services provided this opportunity.

So the meeting on 1 March 2007 in part was devoted to this review, especially focusing on the decision to close the Mulgrave Ward at Whitby Community Hospital, implemented in October 2006. Adding to the public perception of a general run down of services at the Hospital was the proposals to cease the 'home from home' birthing service, as discussed above. On top of all this the North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust (NYY PCT) had announced in late February that it had pulled its bid for capital funding for a new Hospital for Whitby from the Department of Health funding pot of £750 million targeted at Community Hospitals.

Patently there was evidence that underpinned the concerns of local people and I sent an invitation, as Chairman of the Scrutiny of Health Committee, in good time, to Janet Soo-Chung, Chief Executive of the NYY PCT, to send one of her senior officers to attend the meeting.

The NYY PCT own Whitby Community Hospital, and provide all the services there other than maternity, and knowing there was the likelihood of a large public audience it seemed like a good opportunity to hear first hand of these concerns from local people, many of whom who have to rely on the Hospital for their healthcare services.

It was also the perfect opportunity for the new NYY PCT to demonstrate its commitment to the Hospital and to the local community in Whitby and its hinterland, and to get its message across.

I have to say I was very disappointed when I received a letter just a few days before the meeting, in which Janet Soo-Chung declined my invitation, reflecting that she could not see any value in sending one of her senior officers to the meeting.

My disappointment (reflected also by the Committee in its resolution) was minor compared to the outrage expressed by the 200 local people at the meeting at the failure of the NYY PCT to attend. It was very difficult to answer the concerns they raised so we proceeded to note them down in the form of questions and the Whitby Gazette kindly agreed to publish those questions and any answers received from the NYY PCT in full in their newspaper.

Eventually the 20 questions posed at the meeting and the 20 answers from the NYY PCT were published in the Whitby Gazette. I am very happy to provide these by e-mail or hard copy to any member if they would like them.

Suffice to say many of the answers do not address the heart of the questions, and those local people looking in the answers for a clear demonstration of commitment by the NYY PCT to Whitby Community Hospital and its services will be somewhat disheartened in what they read.

The NYY PCT offered instead of sending a senior officer to the meeting to join with the Scrutiny of Health Committee in a small working group to examine the issues around Whitby Community Hospital and we have taken the PCT up on this offer.

Healthcare Commission Annual Health Checks

Last year an additional duty was placed on all Scrutiny of Health Committees, this to consider commenting on the performance of NHS Trusts they scrutinise with regard to the engagement the Committees had experienced with the Trust over a 12 month period. What was being asked was in effect to 'reality check', using the Scrutiny of Health Committees and their informal networks, the self assessments the NHS Trusts have to submit annually to the Healthcare Commission, the Government's health watchdog.

Last year we trekked around each of the 13 NHS Trusts we scrutinised then to accomplish this task, an onerous undertaking but very important because you are making contacts and building up the Committee's informal networks whilst at the same time keeping abreast of the latest developments.

There is also the opportunity to influence and improve the services the NHS Trusts provide, as the comments the Scrutiny of Health Committees make are published UNABRIDGED on the national Healthcare Commission website which has a huge number of hits during the course of a year. Understandably NHS Trusts wish to avoid any unfavourable comments from the Scrutiny of Health Committee and it has been known for them to respond quickly and positively to any concerns we raise so that we can amend our entry before it reaches the Healthcare Commission website.

This year we again visited the NHS Trusts, down to 9 now because of the mergers of the PCTs and the Ambulance Trusts, but still a sizeable undertaking. I would like to thank the Vice Chairman of the Committee, CC David Billing, and the LibDem Group Spokesperson, CC David Heather for accompanying me on all these visits, and other members of the Committee who joined us from time to time when we were calling on their local NHS Trust.

Given the high profile the NHS currently has in the County due to its financial crisis and the challenges this brings, I have sent a copy of the comments the Scrutiny of Health Committee have made on each of the NHS Trusts to every member of the County Council. They offer a particularly topical commentary on the situation each NHS Trust faces, and taken together they offer a view of the "Big Picture" of the state of healthcare provision currently in North Yorkshire.

The Pain Clinic at Scarborough District General Hospital

The reduction in services offered at the Scarborough Pain Clinic has been on the Scrutiny of Health Committee's radar screen for some time, and we offered to act as a facilitator between supporters of the Clinic and the NYY PCT who commission these services. This involved meeting both sides separately as demanded by the NYY PCT.

We learnt at our meeting with the NYY PCT that our interest plus the compelling arguments being run by the Scarborough Pain Clinic, and the number of patients attending the Clinic (some 3500 in all) had led Janet Soo-Chung to take a personal interest in moving matters forward. She had arranged to meet the Scarborough Pain Clinic supporters on 1 May when the NYY PCT held its Board Meeting in the town.

CC David Billing attended this meeting on behalf of the Scrutiny of Health Committee.

Scheduled Meeting on 27 April 2007 at Harrogate Pavilions

After the frenetic series of meetings in the east of the County the meeting on 27 April was a welcome return to normality. But the issues being considered were of no less importance to the healthcare of communities in North Yorkshire. We heard how the South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust and the Tees Esk and Wear Valleys Mental Health Trusts are planning to move towards foundation status in the 12 months or so.

We also had enlightening and candid briefing from John Lawlor, Chief Executive of the Harrogate Foundation Trust, the Trust that operates Harrogate District Hospital. John summarised how his Trust had tackled the problems created for it by the NYY PCT's financial difficulties. It was not all doom and gloom and there were some very positive and innovative developments being introduced at Harrogate District Hospital which had been given extra impetus by the need to come to terms with the PCT's reduced commissioning plans.

Scrutiny Review – the impact of the downsizing of hospital in patient beds

We decided at our meeting in Harrogate to undertake a detailed Scrutiny Review into the availability of in-patient hospital beds at all the acute Hospitals that serve the residents of North Yorkshire. .

The background to this Review is the serious concerns that have been expressed to the Scrutiny of Health Committee by key officers in various NHS Trusts whilst conducting our visits to complete our Healthcare Commission Health Checks. These concerns circulate around the downsizing of the number of in-patient hospital beds at the various hospitals that serve North Yorkshire, this as a result of the strategy handed down from the Department of Health, and the financial difficulties being experienced by the North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust. These two organizations aim to prevent people being admitted into hospital, and reduce the length of stay of those people who have to be admitted in the first case.

The discussions the Scrutiny of Health Committee have had with the Acute Trusts that operate hospitals serving North Yorkshire have raised the spectre of patients arriving at their local hospital needing unplanned in-patient care having to be sent to another hospital for this care, or having to travel from hospital to hospital until a spare in-patient bed has been located, as a result of this downsizing.

This will inevitably lead to an increased workload for emergency patient transfers for ambulances in the Yorkshire Ambulance Service, or their ambulances simply being used as a holding resource until a bed becomes available. In turn this could have an impact on the availability of ambulances to respond to emergency calls within the National target times. It is accepted that even now there are times when the Yorkshire Ambulance Service is already over-stretched so there will be difficulties in dealing with the additional demand the downsizing of in-patient hospital beds will create.

The Review will also examine the capacity of the North Yorkshire County Council Social Services to deal with the increased demand placed upon it by the people who in the past would have been cared for in hospital but under the new initiative will now be cared for in the community.

The Scrutiny of Health Committee is to conduct a detailed Scrutiny review of these issues and it will report its findings late in 2007. It intends to adopt a Select Committee style of approach in gathering the evidence from the various NHS and partner organisations. Wherever possible and practicable all meetings will be held in public.

Yorkshire Air Ambulance

After the meeting in Harrogate we visited by invitation the Yorkshire Air Ambulance base at the Multi Flight complex at Leeds-Bradford Airport. The Air Ambulance helicopter was parked ready for instant call-out but we were able to inspect it and very impressive it was too. We were also shown around the Control Centre, which has the very latest in digital electronic aids, to minimise the time spent in finding and reaching the patient and then getting him or her to the nearest appropriate hospital.

We met the paramedics from the Yorkshire Air Ambulance who were standing by awaiting a call-out, and the helicopter pilot. All are obviously very, very committed to providing the excellent service in emergency situations that the Yorkshire Air Ambulance is very much renowned for.

We learnt that the Air Ambulance is increasingly being called out to deal with emergencies, and that the funds raised from the Richard Hammond (of Top Gear) Appeal will be used to lease a second helicopter, this one being capable of flying at night. This is a truly exciting new development which the Scrutiny of Health Committee will be involved in when it brokers a high profile seminar between the various organisations that deliver the

Yorkshire Air Ambulance Service and local planning authorities to identify a network of helicopter landing sites serving all parts of the County that can be used at night.

The co-operation and partnership between the Yorkshire Air Ambulance and the Yorkshire Ambulance Service is to be highly commended as it is particularly appropriate in a rural and deeply rural County like North Yorkshire where the time to reach a patient in need of emergency admission to hospital and the time then to reach the nearest suitable hospital are bound to be extended by some of the long distances involved.

Tailpiece – The Best in the Country

The 2007 Annual Report from Dr Fosters, a research and intelligence Agency that specialises in the NHS, has returned these very interesting results:

Best Large Hospital Trust in England

The South Tees NHS Trust, which owns and operates the James Cook University Hospital in Middlesbrough and the Friarage Hospital in Northallerton.

Best Small Hospital in England

Harrogate District Hospital

This award adds on to the accolade Harrogate District Hospital received in the 2006 Healthcare Commission Health Checks where it was the only hospital in England to receive a Double Excellent in Quality of Services and Use of Resources.

Residents in North Yorkshire are indeed very fortunate to be served by these 3 first class Hospitals. No wonder the Communities here in the County are ready to man the barricades to protect the health care institutions that contribute so much to their good health and well being, and quality of life.

You cannot help but feel that this point is occasionally lost on those who, in the course of their duty, have to tamper with all this excellence.

County Councillor John Blackie
(Upper Dales Division)

Chairman – North Yorkshire County Council Scrutiny of Health Committee
08 May 2007