

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

10 October 2007

SCRUTINY OF HEALTH COMMITTEE – CHAIRMAN’S STATEMENT

Special Meeting at the Spa in Scarborough on 19 September 2007

The Scrutiny of Health Committee (SoHC) held a special meeting on the evening of 19 September at the Spa, Scarborough. This meeting replaced the meeting scheduled for 14 September 2007. This meeting was convened against a background of the Scarborough and North East Yorkshire (SNEY) NHS Trust announcing in July that it needed to lose over 600 WTE posts in order to achieve savings of nearly £30 million over the next three years which included an historical debt of £20.7 million.

At that time the Trust made it clear that this reduction of one third of its workforce could not be achieved without cutting altogether a number of healthcare services currently provided at Scarborough District General Hospital and Bridlington Community Hospital, although it would not be known which services would be affected until the SNEY NHS Trust Board meeting in early September.

It was on this basis that the SoHC was arranged as it would enable the Committee to have a first look at the Trust's detailed plans for the services to be provided at Scarborough and Bridlington Hospitals in the future, and those that were going to be proposed for reduction or being cut out altogether. It would also give the Committee an opportunity to look very carefully at the Trust's plans for consulting on these changes with both the NYCC and the East Riding of Yorkshire Council Scrutiny of Health Committees, and with the consultants, doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals and support staff at the Hospital.

It would also give local people their first opportunity in an appropriate setting and in the presence of the Chief Executive and Board Members of the SNEY NHS Trust to let the Committee know their views and concerns with regard to the plans to downsize the staffing complement by one third and reduce or cut key healthcare services at the 2 Hospitals.

During the latter part of July and into August arrangements were made for the meeting to be staged in close co-operation with the East Riding of Yorkshire Scrutiny of Health Committee, the NHS Trust Patient and Public Involvement Forum (PPIF), and Scarborough Borough Council.

In a bizarre turn of events in early September the SNEY NHS Trust announced that it had come to an arrangement with the Yorkshire and the Humber Strategic Health Authority (SHA) that repayment of the historic debt of £20.7 million had been postponed as long as the Trust avoided incurring any further deficits on its annual balance sheets. This means it has to make £10 million of savings in this financial year, by the end of March 2008.

The last minute complete change of stance by the Strategic Health Authority was very welcome, as previously it was demanding that the historic debt should be repaid within 3 years and it was this demand that had led to the drastic proposals announced by the

SNEY NHS Trust in July. Clearly however the temporary nature of the reprieve remains a real concern amongst the local communities in Scarborough, Bridlington and surrounding areas who highly value and depend upon the healthcare services provided at the two hospitals.

The SoHC meeting was held in The Grand Hall at the Spa in Scarborough and was attended by around 300 members of the public.

Iain McInnes, Chief Executive of the SNEY NHS Trust, addressing the meeting, offered an explanation for the events over the summer months, and then confirmed that the amount that needed to be saved was £10 million by March 2008, and suggested £8 million of savings towards this target had already been identified. He hoped that all the savings could be achieved without having a detrimental impact on healthcare services.

In response to questions he confirmed that the current range of paediatric and children's services at Scarborough Hospital, including routine and emergency surgery, would be maintained, this much to the relief of the audience, as well as a full trauma service to back up a 24 / 7 Accident & Emergency service.

The meeting was also addressed by senior consultants at the 2 Hospitals, a local GP, the Chairman of the SNEY PPIF, Leo McGrory, and Robert Goodwill MP. Anne McKintosh MP was also present, and John Greenaway MP was represented by his Constituency Agent.

All expressed their concerns that the threat of the repayment of the historic debt at some unspecified time in the future remained, that communications and consultation between the SNEY Trust and all its staff needed to be vastly improved, and that the 2 Hospitals were being run on a shoestring with staffing being pared to the bone and everyday essential equipment being in short supply.

It appeared that the SNEY Trust could not even afford to subscribe to medical journals, a hugely important training resource.

A constant theme was a "Fair shares for all" approach to regional healthcare funding, as it is apparent the historical debt has been accumulated in part as a result of a lower per capita funding regime for the East Coast when compared, for example, to the Harrogate area.

Adding to these concerns were those articulated by the audience over the SNEY NHS Trust's lack of proper engagement and consultation with local people recently.

All speakers and most of the contributors from the audience also recorded their intense disappointment at the failure of the North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust (PCT), the East Riding of Yorkshire PCT, and the Yorkshire and Humber SHA to be represented at the meeting. These key players both in the local NHS and in resolving the crisis at the SNEY NHS Trust had agreed by e-mail to come, or indicated in advance that they may be present at the meeting, and then subsequently released a Media statement confirming they would not be attending.

The Yorkshire Ambulance Service (YAS) fielded 3 very senior officers at the meeting and drew a huge round of applause from the audience for doing so. The Committee heard that the YAS could not support the plans proposed by the SNEY NHS Trust to close the coronary monitoring unit and run down acute medical services at Bridlington Hospital

unless the NHS made an investment of £1 million in new ambulances and front line staff to transfer emergency patients from the communities served by Bridlington Hospital directly to Scarborough Hospital.

Opinion seems to strongly support the view that the meeting was an essential watershed between the turmoil of the summer months and charting a way forward to a sustainable, vibrant future for the healthcare services local people in Scarborough, Bridlington and the surrounding areas depend upon and need on a day to day basis.

This future is dependent on the SNEY NHS Trust recognising that all those involved in the provision of healthcare services at the hospitals, consultants, doctors, nurses, healthcare professionals support and all other staff, major key partners such as local GPs and Social Services, and patients and members of the public need to be properly consulted and communicated with from the outset, and a common set of objectives established so that there is the necessary ownership for an agreed way forward.

The next few months will be crucially important in the life of the SNEY NHS Trust and the future of healthcare services at Scarborough and Bridlington Hospitals, and the Scrutiny of Health Committee resolved at its meeting at the Spa to monitor very carefully any and all developments that are proposed by the Trust to address the demands of the Strategic Health Authority for an in-year financial balance.

Maternity Services at Malton, Whitby and Bridlington Community Hospitals

In conjunction with the East Riding of Yorkshire Council a letter has been sent to the Secretary of State for Health, Alan Johnson MP, formally announcing that we are going to refer the proposed closure of the midwife-led home from home maternity units at Malton, Whitby and Bridlington Community Hospitals to him under the powers invested in Scrutiny of Health Committees to make a referral where they conclude that a change in service provision is not in the interest of local people and the local NHS service.

Work is now in hand to pull together the necessary evidence and documentation in support of our case, much of which relates to the Department of Health National Choice Agenda for expectant mothers, "Maternity Matters" published in April of this year which promises there will be a choice for mums-to-be of a home from home birth in a community facility, such as a Community Hospital.

Representatives from the 2 Scrutiny of Health Committees intend to travel to the Department of Health in London, along with a small number of 'Save our hospital campaigners' from Malton, Whitby and Bridlington, to hand deliver our case file to the Secretary of State for Health or his representative. We will be asking local MPs in the 3 towns to try to arrange for an opportunity to press our case with senior politicians and civil servants at the Department of Health whilst we are there.

The delegation is due to travel to London towards the end of October, with the finalised date subject to making all the necessary arrangements.

The proposals to close the 3 maternity units cannot be implemented until the Secretary of State has reviewed them in the light of the case we have made to keep them open. It is not a foregone conclusion that he will simply endorse their closure, and indeed in the case of the Darzi Review of acute services on Teesside, Patricia Hewitt MP, the then Secretary of State for Health, accepted most of the conclusions of the Joint Scrutiny Committee,

which included representatives from North Yorkshire County Council SoHC, and did not support the Darzi recommendations.

Local people in Malton, Whitby and Bridlington value highly the services at their local Community Hospitals, and having them available on their doorstep. There is very strong community support for continuing the home from home midwife led maternity services in the 3 hospitals, and a fear that their closure is the thin end of the wedge, leading to a further run down of services and eventual closure of the Hospitals themselves.

It does not re-assure local communities that the 3 hospitals are run by Primary Care Trusts that are struggling to deal with deficits, and might look to a closure of a community hospital and subsequent realisation of its capital assets, as a masterplan for achieving financial salvation.

County Councillor John Blackie
(Upper Dales Division)

Chairman – North Yorkshire County Council Scrutiny of Health Committee
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