

Consultation on proposals for Shaping the Future of Healthcare in East Berkshire - Healthcare services in Bracknell and Ascot : Joint Response by Bracknell Forest Council's Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing; and the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel

General

Bracknell Forest Council is supportive of the specific service changes proposed in the consultation document. However, the proposals are limited and localised, such that they do not justify the title of 'Shaping the future of health services'. In particular, the consultation document does not explain how the proposals will give better long-term prospects for efficient and good quality health services.

We believe the consultation is flawed in that it fails to mention or explain:

- Whether the proposed changes will result in Heatherwood Hospital having a sustainable financial position. The proposed further removal of services from the hospital should be set out in the context of whatever is the full, future vision for that site.
- The nature of the infrastructure surrounding the new surgical centre envisaged at Heatherwood, particularly for emergency treatment for in-patients.
- That the proposals have significant knock-on consequences for Frimley Park Hospital and the Royal Berkshire, which are the major acute hospitals serving the population of Bracknell Forest.
- The move of the GP Out of Hours service, which is mentioned fleetingly on page 8, but does not form part of the set consultation questions.
- The consultation document could usefully have commented on any strategic implications of this proposal on the Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) in Maidenhead, on the Walk In Centre in Slough, and on the A&E service at Wexham Park Hospital, including Urgent Care.
- The consultation document lacks a financial analysis showing the impact of the proposed change to maternity services.
- It also fails to mention the role of independent hospitals, which we understand patients can choose to secure their treatment from.

Without this fuller picture, people cannot make a sufficiently well-informed response to the consultation, nor should the Primary Care Trust Board make any decisions on service changes without reference to those wider consequences.

The Council is anxious that the proposals may significantly disadvantage the Bracknell Forest and Ascot Clinical Commissioning Group, and hence local residents. Our anxiety is heightened by the Memorandum of Understanding, arranged by the Primary Care Trust, in which the CCG's buying NHS health services in East Berkshire are to give preferential treatment to Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospital Trust (H&WPT). It is essential that the contracts are constructed in such a way to reflect patient flows. Anything other than this would put the CCG under financial pressure as it is clear that patients are exercising their right to choose which acute healthcare provider they want.

This comment is in line, we believe, with the four key 'tests' set out by the Secretary of State for service change. If contracts are tied up to promote H&WPT sustainability then we are not convinced that the test in relation to 'consistency with current and

prospective patient choice' will be met. We also regard this preferential treatment for one Trust over others to run counter to the philosophy of Foundation Trusts and to the achievement of value for money in the long-term.

It must be recognised that H&WPT is no longer the preferred service provider in Bracknell Forest and that any attempts to manipulate the local market and inhibit patient choice or place the CCG in financial difficulty will be resisted at the highest possible level.

Q1 Proposal: We are proposing to move the Minor Injuries Unit at Heatherwood Hospital in Ascot to the planned Urgent Care Centre in Bracknell. Do you agree with this proposal? Please tick the box below which most closely represents your view.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	

Please use this space to explain the reasons for your view:

The Urgent Care Centre has already been the subject of an NHS consultation and Health Service Commissioners agreed the case for 'Healthspace' – incorporating the UCC - in Bracknell Forest, with an announced completion date of 2010. However, this has not been delivered, to the detriment of the local population. The clinical and business case for the UCC is compelling, and locating the service at Brants Bridge will put it much closer to where the majority of the population live – and that population is growing fast. The Council urges the PCT to ensure that the Healthspace proceeds at pace at Brants Bridge, and is happy to assist in that objective.

We are, however, concerned about the potential for limited Doctor presence at the UCC. In our view, it would be helpful to maximise the presence in order to increase public confidence in using it and to enhance the range of people who can be seen and rightfully diverted from A&E, and would encourage and support commissioners in this regard.

The terminology 'Urgent Care Centre' is imprecise and open to varying interpretations by service users. Another term – perhaps 'A&E Light' – supported by a good communications strategy (giving specific and simple examples of which conditions are treated in each type of establishment), should be explored to more succinctly explain how the service offering differs to MIU and A&E.

Q2 Proposal: We are proposing to improve rehabilitation services for both stroke and general medical patients, taking therapies to them in their own homes or communities in line with best practice and national clinical guidance. This would result in the closure of Ward 8 at Heatherwood Hospital in Ascot. Do you agree with this proposal? Please tick the box below which most closely represents your view.

<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agree
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	

Please use this space to explain the reasons for your view:

The Council supports the principle of this proposal and urges the PCT to consider more innovative approaches to rehabilitation similar to that agreed between the CCG and the Council, to improve efficiency and outcomes for individuals. There needs to be more clarity about the relationship between these services and acute rehabilitation. The consultation document is lacking, in that it is silent on plans for other rehabilitation services on the other sites.

The Council's agreement to this proposal is subject to an important caveat. It is essential to demonstrably ensure that the community response is sufficient and properly funded by the NHS to meet the new demands that will be put on it. This must be robust both before the change takes place, and afterwards. Related to this, a great deal is already expected of carers and given also the increase in the proportion of people living alone, the NHS need to be very cognisant of public anxiety about the existence, ability and willingness of carers in a home setting, sufficient to ensure a safe discharge from hospital.

It should also be recognised that the current rehabilitation practices differ between boroughs in East Berkshire.

Q3 Proposal: We are proposing to permanently close the Ascot Birth Centre at Heatherwood Hospital and offer women a range of birth choices at other locations. Do you agree with this proposal? Please tick the box below which most closely represents your view.

Strongly agree

X Agree

Don't know

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Please use this space to explain the reasons for your view:

The Council supports the proposals if the choices are real. Members have expressed concern about whether resources will always be available to provide for the home birth option, when expectant mothers request that.