

HOSC submitted a report to the PCTs in October 2007 which made a series of recommendations about issues the PCTs should consider when coming to a decision. HOSC's key recommendation was that several new options which had arisen through the consultation process, including some which retained services on two sites, should be fully assessed before the PCTs came to a decision.

In December 2007, the PCTs took the decision to proceed with one of their original options – to consolidate consultant-led services in Hastings with a midwife-led birthing unit in Eastbourne. The PCTs also accepted all HOSC's recommendations as conditions of their decision. Whilst HOSC welcomes the PCTs' acceptance of the recommendations, the Committee has heard evidence which leaves it unconvinced that its key recommendation, that the PCTs assess the potential alternative options, has been fulfilled.

In addition, based on the evidence collected throughout the process, HOSC has outstanding concerns about the safety of the PCTs' decision and the detrimental impact on access for many East Sussex women and their families. In January 2008, HOSC therefore determined that the PCTs' decision is not in the best interests of the health service for East Sussex residents for the following reasons:

1. The divergence of clinical opinion on what configuration of maternity and obstetric services will be best for the residents of East Sussex.
2. Evidence that longer travel times to the obstetric unit could endanger the safety of women and babies.
3. Evidence that the distance of the midwife-led unit from the consultant-led unit could create undue risk to the safety of women and babies and questions over whether this is the best configuration for midwife-led care.
4. A lack of convincing evidence that patient outcomes will be improved with a single site configuration for consultant-led care.
5. Evidence that there may be a reduction in women's choice owing to the coastal location of both sites, the population distribution in East Sussex and the proposed configuration of services; all of which may be compounded in areas where there is significant deprivation.
6. Evidence that possible alternatives which could maintain services on two sites may not have been fully explored and considered.

HOSC supported the PCTs' decision to improve ante and post-natal care and associated outreach services as there is strong evidence that this is in the best interests of health services for East Sussex residents. This aspect of the PCTs decision is specifically excluded from this referral and indeed HOSC has urged the PCTs to make rapid progress on these improvements.

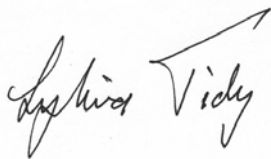
Since HOSC's decision, the PCTs have made it clear that they do not share the Committee's concerns and intend to proceed with the implementation of their decision. HOSC has concluded that independent review of the decision through referral to you, and the advice you will seek from the Independent Reconfiguration Panel, is the best way to ensure fair consideration of all the options for the future of these services.

I enclose further details of the committee's concerns as outlined above and a copy of HOSC's report which explains the context and issues in detail, as well as summarising the extensive evidence gathered by HOSC to inform its decision.

HOSC is not against change where it is necessary, and in its report the Committee recognises that there are real pressures facing the services which require them to change in some way. However, HOSC is firmly of the view that the PCTs' decision does not represent the right solution for the particular needs of East Sussex communities and there are potential alternatives which should be fully and independently considered. East Sussex HOSC therefore urges you to request that the Independent Reconfiguration Panel undertakes a full review of the proposals at the earliest opportunity.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sylvia Tidy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Councillor Sylvia Tidy
Chairman
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

cc:

Cllr John Barnes, Chairman, East Sussex Downs and Weald PCT
Charles Everett, Chairman, Hastings and Rother PCT
Nick Yeo, Chief Executive, East Sussex Downs and Weald/Hastings and Rother PCTs
Graham Eccles, Chairman, NHS South East Coast
Candy Morris, Chief Executive, NHS South East Coast

Enclosures:

- Table of evidence supporting East Sussex HOSC's referral of East Sussex PCTs 'Fit for the Future' proposals, East Sussex HOSC, March 2008
- Response to East Sussex PCTs on 'Creating an NHS Fit for the Future', East Sussex HOSC report, October 2007