



News Release

29th January 2008

Ref: PR 1793

For Immediate Release

Changes to maternity services referred to Secretary of State

Planned changes to maternity services in East Sussex have been challenged by the county's Health Overview Scrutiny Committee (HOSC). In a move that will see the proposals referred to the Secretary of State, members of HOSC voted against the Primary Care Trusts' case for one consultant-led maternity service at Hastings and a birthing centre at Eastbourne.

Cllr Sylvia Tidy, HOSC chair, summed up the committee's decision saying:

"We need to be 100% certain that these proposals will offer an improved service for women giving birth. At present, HOSC remains unconvinced. Unless the PCTs are prepared to reconsider their decision, we have no choice but to refer our concerns to the Secretary of State, and request an independent review. In this way, we hope that all the options will be fairly considered, and a high level of independent scrutiny brought not only to the clinical issues, but to the preferences of local people."

HOSC is made up of members of local district and borough councils as well as the county council, with additional members representing the voluntary sector, and the Patient and Public Involvement Forums.

Between May and September 2007, HOSC undertook an extensive programme of evidence gathering, to help it understand the clinical issues at stake, the staffing challenges and the needs and preferences of local people. Those who contributed evidence included hospital doctors, midwives, GPs, the National Childbirth Trust (NCT), South East Coast Ambulance Trust, and Patient and Public Involvement Forums. National guidance and best practice on maternity services was also reviewed by the Committee.

In October 2007, HOSC recommended that the PCTs thoroughly assessed all the options, including an alternative 'fifth option' put forward by local campaign groups, before deciding upon changes to maternity services at Hastings and



The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is managed by East Sussex County Council and works in partnership with Eastbourne Borough Council, Hastings Borough Council, Lewes District Council, Rother District Council and Wealden District Council.

Eastbourne. Other options included retaining consultant-led maternity and special baby care services on both sites with alternative staffing arrangements.

Thanks to the HOSC vote, plans to change maternity services at Eastbourne and Hastings will now be put on hold. Unless the PCTs change their decision, HOSC will request that the Secretary of State launches an independent review. This process is expected to take approximately six months.

HOSC did support the PCTs' decision to improve antenatal care and outreach services in the county, especially in deprived areas – and voted unanimously in favour of this proposal. This means the PCTs will be able to start implementing these changes straightaway.

Notes for editors

- HOSC supports local people, by examining all major health-care decisions taken within the county.
- HOSC looks at the work of the primary care trusts and National Health Service (NHS) trusts and the South East Coast Strategic Health Authority. It acts as a 'critical friend' by suggesting ways that health related services might be improved. It also looks at the way the health service interacts with the County Council's social care services, the voluntary sector, independent providers and other council services to jointly provide better health services to meet the diverse needs of East Sussex residents and improve their well-being.
- The two district general hospitals in Eastbourne and Hastings are situated approximately 21 miles apart on the coastal strip of East Sussex. In terms of the maternity service, both hospitals offer a consultant-led obstetric (childbirth) service with the Eastbourne site handling approximately 1900 births and the Hastings site approximately 1700 births (based on 2006/7 figures). This works out at approximately 5 births per day per site, of which statistically 2 per day at each site will require some form of medical intervention.
- In the vote, 9 HOSC members voted in favour, 3 voted against.

For further information please contact:

Charlotte Johnson

Tel: 01273 481435

Email: charlotte.johnson@eastsussex.gov.uk

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee website: www.eastsussexhealth.org