

The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health
Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London SW1A 2NS

28th March 2013

Dear Mr Hunt

Re. Closure of the Neuro-Rehabilitation Unit, Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Disease (RNHRD), Bath from 31st March 2013

We are writing to you as the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny (PDS) Panel at Bath & North East Somerset Council. The Panel has taken a proactive interest in the proposal by the Board of the RNHRD to close the Unit. There has been significant public interest.

We have concerns about the way in which the Board have engaged with both the public and the Council in its Health Scrutiny role.

What are our concerns?

At our public meeting on January 28th 2013, the PDS Panel were officially informed of the decision by the RNHRD Board to close the Neuro-Rehabilitation Unit.

Prior to this meeting, Local Involvement Network representatives informed us they had insufficient opportunity to comment on the proposal. RNHRD Governors also expressed their concerns about the plans in respect of maintaining an appropriate service for the Unit's current patients elsewhere. We also discovered that the staff team at the Unit had been given notices.

It was not until 22nd March 2013 when the Panel received a report upon our request from the Specialised Commissioning Team for the South West about the re-provision of specialised neuro-rehabilitation services and further presentations from the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group and the RNHRD about this important aspect of the decision.

Why does this matter?

Elected representatives acting on behalf of their local communities must have an adequate amount of time to review and scrutinise any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of the health service in its area.

By the 28th January 2013, it was clear that the RNHRD Board had already made a decision to close the Unit without operating within the spirit of The Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013 – part 4 (Health Scrutiny by Local Authority), Section 23 – Consultation by responsible persons.

We had no opportunity to meaningfully feedback on the proposal, nor did the RNHRD Board have proper time to act on any comment from us. The consultation that did take place was post-hoc and the assessment of the impact on current patients was reported just 9 days before the closure.

If the duties of Local Authorities as set out in statute are to have any impact we'd expect decisions, such as those proposed by the RNHRD Board, to be reported to us at a much earlier stage.

What would we like you to do?

We feel it is important that the Coalition Government stands strongly behind its own legislation and backs Local Authorities to do an effective job of scrutinising local health decision-making. We would like you to:

- Investigate this matter and consider the points we have made about this case;
- Offer some guidance about your expectations in relation to health bodies reporting substantial developments of the health service in the area of a Local Authority, or for a substantial variation in the provision of service – particularly in respect of the timing of reporting.

Finally, we would like to put on record the excellent clinical service provided by the Neuro-Rehabilitation Unit.

We thank you for your time in considering this issue.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Vic Pritchard and Councillor Katie Hall
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