

Protect Our NHS BANES

Statement to The Health and Well Being Board Oct 12th 2016

Decision re: community health and social care services November 10th 2016

Protect Our NHS BANES have concerns about the probable awarding of the community services contract to Virgin Care. There are specific issues which relate to the remit of the Health and Well Being Board which we would like to raise with you.

Collaboration

Your terms of reference state that one of your aims is to work collaboratively across the NHS, social care, public health and other areas. We feel that this aspect has not been given sufficient weight in the procurement process. The Virgin Care bid appears to place great emphasis on IT to achieve integration and has little to say about fostering a collaborative culture which is equally, if not more, important. We believe that the rejection of LiNK's bid, which brings together key local health partners including the local acute hospital and mental health trust, is a lost opportunity to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions and facilitate effective discharges. The Virgin model that we have seen does not demonstrate how this aspect will be delivered in practice.

We are also worried that a private company, like Virgin Care, with its concern for commercial confidentiality will not find it easy to work with partners with whom it has no contractual relationship. We have heard that this has been a problem elsewhere which has affected patient care.

Virgin Care proposes to introduce a model using a care co-ordination centre. The only place where we have been able to identify a similar Virgin Care model is in East Staffs. This much smaller contract has only been running for 4 months. We would like to know how effective this has been in 'joining up services and information' for patients, and whether it is delivering the outcomes claimed. Has objective evidence been sought?

Consultation and involvement

Your TOR place a duty on the Board to ensure 'wider engagement' (para 6). We appreciate that the Your Care Your Way team has involved community champions in the development of priorities and the drawing up of the specification for the contract but this is not the same as public consultation. Most people we have spoken to, including users of Sirona's services, are largely in the dark about these plans and furthermore are shocked to discover that the services may be handed over to a private for profit company. Councillors will only have one week to scrutinise the business case and contract. As a Board are you concerned that the procurement process, with its strict government guidelines, has undermined good practice in public engagement?

Quality of Care

The operation of the new contract will take place in a climate of rising demand for social care (the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment estimates, for example, an increase in dementia amongst women of 23% by 2025 and 43% amongst men). At the same time there will be further cuts in local authority budgets. We appreciate that growing needs will require new and innovative approaches but delivering high quality care especially to people at the end of their lives will remain a key objective; the Virgin Care colourful plan makes virtually no reference to this.

We understand that this is the first contract where Virgin would take over the full local authority legislative responsibilities for adult social care – care assessment, determination of eligibility and care planning. We would like to see more detail about how they will fulfil these responsibilities and how Virgin will cope with rising demand and make cost savings - we doubt that this can be achieved by IT alone!

Monitoring

Monitoring outcomes, targets, quality and costs is a complex and detailed process. We would question whether a small local authority and CCG have the resources and expertise to do this on an ongoing basis. We are also concerned that when dealing with a private company this process will not be open and transparent to elected members and, indeed the public, as Freedom of Information requests will not apply.

Pam Richards

On behalf of Protect Our NHS BANES