

## Statement to Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel

8<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Along with many others, I campaigned strongly against the awarding of the contract for Community Health and Care Services to Virgin Care in 2017. We have clearly been vindicated in our position since the contract has now been handed to HCRG Care, a company wholly owned by Twenty20 Capital whose stated aim is to 'look for significant returns in 2-5 years'.

The secretive way that this transfer took place, announced just two weeks after Virgin Care had taken part in discussions with commissioners who agreed to extend the contract for three more years, raises huge concerns about a lack of good faith on the part of the provider.

Apparently the Council have received assurances by HCRG that 'nothing will change'.

HCRG have said "Our contract and our contractual commitments remain the same."

Can such assurances be relied upon? The Council say that negotiations are continuing but what is there to be negotiated?

Councillor Pritchard has said that "any intervention could compromise a satisfactory outcome, possibly putting jobs at risk and compromising public confidence in the service." Why should that be if HCRG are committed to fulfilling the contract as agreed until 2024 when the current contract ends?

This lack of transparency is likely in itself to compromise public confidence.

And what about the role of this Scrutiny Panel? A purpose of the Panel is:

**'To assist the Cabinet by giving comments on issues identified as "Key Decisions" prior to a decision being made'**

How are you to do that when you are not being given the facts nor the opportunity to discuss them?

Councillor Pritchard has apparently said:

"I'm repeatedly advised by the Chief Executive that scrutiny will not and cannot play a part in the Virgin Care situation as it's a contractual matter for the executive to decide."

The decision whether or not to extend the contract when the current contract ends is a decision for Cabinet; the role of this Scrutiny Panel is to advise them before that decision is taken.

A provision of the Health and Care Bill currently going through Parliament is that the commissioners will not in future need to put contracts out for tender but will be free to take services back in-house, thereby saving the previous enormous cost of tendering. They will also be free from the constraints imposed on service provision by the needs of commerce to make a profit for shareholders.

Barbara Gordon