

Statement from Paula Riseborough on HRCG Care Group Options Appraisal

(Re: prime provider contract extension for BathNES community health and care services)

I'm speaking today to highlight one of the many issues that I object to regarding the outsourcing of BathNES health and care services to private provider HCRG Care Group (formerly known as Virgin Care).

I'm a Bath resident and part of campaign group Protect our NHS BANES. Our many concerns regarding the handover of our community health and care services on 2017 to a private provider are well known to the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel. Most recently we have objected to the behaviour of Virgin Care executives in secretly negotiating a takeover of their company by Twenty20 Capital, without informing the commissioners (the Council and BathNES CCG) of this until after they had approved a 3-year extension of Virgin Care's prime provider contract.

Protect our NHS members have raised questions with our local councillors and with the health scrutiny panel about the procedures involved in the contract negotiations and were reassured when the Council announced that due diligence work and a revised options appraisal would be carried out regarding this contract extension.

However, on reading the Scrutiny Panel's Agenda for its 17 May meeting, together with the HCRG Care Group Options Appraisal document, I was dismayed to find that the long awaited report is to be presented to the Panel 'in private session due to the commercial sensitivity of the decision to be taken'. This represents one of my major concerns about outsourcing of publicly funded health and care services to private companies – there is a breakdown of transparency in the functioning of democratic and statutory organisations when the commercial interests of private providers are placed ahead of essential public interest.

As a tax payer and retired NHS professional, I consider that both commissioners and providers of publicly funded health and care services should be transparent in the information they provide to the public. If private providers are unable to be clear and open in their procedures and documentation, they should not be considered for public service contracts. The fact that BathNES Council and the CCG needed to commission a new due diligence process and HRCG Care Group Options Appraisal, at great expense to the commissioners and the public, following Virgin Care's lack of transparency in its proceedings, is a clear illustration of what can happen if transparency and information sharing is not a key value in statutory health and care partnerships.

If the full Options Appraisal document is not to be published, then the commissioners should provide for public scrutiny, at the very least, a summary of the Options Appraisal document. This should include a list of the people consulted for their views (and their job roles), what criteria they were looking at when deciding on a recommended option and, if a decision is made to extend HCRG's contract, what measures the commissioners have in place to prevent the prime provider company being sold on again during the BathNES contract period.