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The Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP
Secretary of State for Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London SW1A 2NS

17 April 2009

Dear Secretary of State

REFERRAL TO SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH
Referral by Islington Health and Wellbeing Review Committee
Closure of Finsbury Health Centre and proposals for relocation of community health services in Islington

Thank you for forwarding copies of the referral letters and supporting documentation from Cllr Paul Convery, Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Review Committee of Islington Council. Initial assessment information was provided by NHS London. We requested and received supplementary information from NHS London. The *Campaign to Save Finsbury Health Centre* also sent information to the IRP. A list of documents received is appended.

The IRP has undertaken an initial assessment. In accordance with our agreed protocol for handling contested proposals for the reconfiguration of NHS services, the IRP offers the following comments.

Background

Proposals for changes to the provision of community health services have been developed by NHS Islington (Islington PCT). A major aspect of the proposals is the movement of services out of Finsbury Health Centre in view of difficulties in maintaining and refurbishing the building. The Centre was built in 1938 and was the first purpose-built health centre in Britain. In view of its architectural and historical importance, the building has been granted Grade 1 listed status. This places restrictions on changes that can be made to the building and on the materials that can be used to carry out repairs or alterations.

Services currently based at the Finsbury Health Centre are: two GP practices – the Clerkenwell Practice and the Pine Street Practice; the administrative base for the local health visiting service; local podiatry; community dental services; contraceptive services; physiotherapy; speech and language therapy; and the Michael Palin Centre for Stammering Children (a national service for children and young people from all over the UK).

A public consultation “*Help us to improve health services in Islington*” was held between September and December 2008. The consultation document states that “*These changes will not lead to fewer services or fewer staff, or lower the quality of services. The proposed moves will give us better premises – physically better and better suited to the services they*

Independent Reconfiguration Panel

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provide. They will also be more accessible for patients and more evenly distributed throughout Islington”.

The consultation document outlines the changes the PCT would like to implement:

- *Move all services from Finsbury Health Centre, keeping local services like podiatry and dentistry in the Finsbury area*
- *Relocate the two GP practices in Finsbury Health Centre to a brand new GP surgery next door*
- *Move podiatry and community dental services from the Goodinge Health Centre to Hornsey Street, N7*
- *Move adult physiotherapy, podiatry and sickle cell/thalassaemia services from the Northern Health Centre to Hornsey Street, N7*
- *Develop a new health centre in Hornsey Street, N7, and*
- *Make the Northern Health Centre the hub for children’s services*

Representatives of NHS Islington attended meetings of the Islington Health and Wellbeing Review Committee on 2 September and 14 October 2008 to explain the methodology and purpose of the consultation. Following conclusion of the public consultation, the NHS Islington Board met on 29 January 2009 and agreed to adopt the plans as proposed in the consultation document. Representatives of NHS Islington attended a Review Committee meeting on 12 February 2009 to report on the outcome.

The Review Committee resolved at its 12 February 2009 meeting to refer the matter to the Secretary of State for Health. A referral letter and supporting documentation was sent on 16 February 2009.

Basis for referral

The referral letter of 16 February 2009 states that *“more information had come to light regarding the proposed closure element of the plans, which impacted on the report considered on 12 February. At this meeting we heard a variety of evidence regarding the significance of the building, disputed costs of refurbishment, concerns regarding the number of residents consulted, the possibility of conversion to be DDA compliant, possible alternative funding sources and other related matters as outlined in the minutes”.*

Referral is made on the grounds that:

- *“NHS Islington has not consulted the Committee on the decision to close Finsbury Health Centre and the consequent disposal of the building. More specifically NHS Islington have failed to consult the Committee on the detailed plans that were agreed by the PCT Board on 29 January 2009, including financial breakdown of costs and other related materials*
- *NHS Islington began its original consultation on service relocation with a pre-prepared solution identified, namely the closure of Finsbury Health Centre and relocation of services*

- *NHS Islington has developed a proposal for the south of the borough that fails to provide the best healthcare for the growing population in future years and the large number of people who work in the area.”*

IRP View

The Panel notes:

- NHS Islington, NHS London and Islington Council have all indicated that there is scope for further work and their commitment to reach a local resolution
- In its current condition, the Finsbury Health Centre is unsuitable for the provision of 21st century healthcare: all parties accept that significant expenditure would be required to bring it up to an acceptable standard
- NHS Islington is fully aware of its responsibilities as the owners of a Grade 1 listed building and is committed to finding an appropriate use for it
- There appear to be options for further exploration, including investigation of charitable grants, possible changes in planning permission and/or ownership
- The Review Committee’s concerns about the consultation process even though representatives of NHS Islington attended a number of its meetings: if the two bodies had previously fallen “out of step”, positive moves are now taking place to address this, notably that NHS Islington and Islington Council intend to form a joint group engaging with local stakeholders to find the best viable future for the Centre

Conclusion

The Panel acknowledges the architectural and historical importance of the Finsbury Health Centre. However, the future of the building itself notwithstanding, the needs of patients and the provision of appropriate, modern services for local residents (and for those users of services for stammering children) must be at the forefront of healthcare planning.

It is encouraging that all parties are keen to find a solution locally and that steps are being taken towards joint working. The Panel supports this approach and would encourage NHS Islington and Islington Council/the Review Committee to agree a process that will provide:

- clarity about how the proposals will deliver better healthcare for local residents
- a reappraisal of the options for future use of the Finsbury Health Centre
- confirmation of whether further consultation with the Review Committee is required and if so how it will be executed

The Panel considers that, through these steps, the matter can be resolved locally. But if, on conclusion of this process, the Review Committee considers that clear grounds for referral remain, it would be open to the Review Committee to refer the matter again.

Yours sincerely

IRP

Dr Peter Barrett CBE
Chair, IRP

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LIST OF DOCUMENTS RECEIVED

Health and Wellbeing Review Committee, Islington Council

- 1 Letter of referral to Secretary of State for Health, 16 February 2009 and appendices
- 2 Appendix 1. Health and Wellbeing Review Meeting, 12 February 2009. Report by NHS Islington: Results of the public consultation on proposals to relocate some community health services within Islington (including submission by *Campaign to Save Finsbury Health Centre* - Response to: Results of the public consultation on proposals to relocate some community health services within Islington, 29 January 2009)
- 3 Appendix 2. Representations from local residents (including local MPs)
- 4 Appendix 3. Representations from Islington Pensioners Forum
- 5 Appendix 4. Health and Wellbeing Committee Meeting, 2 September 2008. Report by NHS Islington: Proposed consultation methodology for public consultation on the relocation of community health services within Islington
- 6 Appendix 5. Consultation document presented to Health and Wellbeing Committee Meeting, 14 October 2008: *Help us to improve health services in Islington*
- 7 Appendix 6. Minutes of Health and Wellbeing Committee Meetings, 2 September and 14 October 2008
- 8 Appendix 7. Draft minutes of Health and Wellbeing Committee Meetings, 12 February 2009

NHS London

- 1 IRP initial template for providing initial assessment information
- 2 Islington PCT Board meeting, 24 July 2008: Paper - Relocation of community health services within Islington
- 3 Minutes of Islington PCT Board meeting, 24 July 2008
- 4 Islington PCT paper for Health and Wellbeing Committee Meeting, 2 September 2008. Report by NHS Islington: Proposed consultation methodology for public consultation on the relocation of community health services within Islington
- 5 Minutes of Health and Wellbeing Committee Meeting, 2 September 2008
- 6 Minutes of Health and Wellbeing Committee Meeting, 14 October 2008
- 7 Letter to Islington PCT from *Campaign to Save Finsbury Health Centre*, 17 November 2008 (includes *Notes of public meeting - Finsbury Health centre under threat: ways forward*, 6 November 2008)
- 8 NHS Islington Board meeting, 29 January 2009: Paper – Results of the public consultation on proposals to relocate some community health services within Islington
- 9 Consultation document: *Help us to improve health services in Islington*
- 10 Islington PCT: Community health services questionnaire
- 11 NHS Islington: Paper - PALS contacts, 29 January 2009
- 12 Submission by *Campaign to Save Finsbury Health Centre* - Response to: Results of the public consultation on proposals to relocate some community health services within Islington, 29 January 2009
- 13 Letter to *Campaign to Save Finsbury Health Centre* from NHS Islington, 22 December 2008

- 14 Finsbury Health Centre: Floor plans
- 15 NHS Islington: Paper – List of letters received in relation to the public consultation, 29 January 2009
- 16 NHS Islington: Paper – Results from all four questionnaires, 29 January 2009
- 17 NHS Islington: Paper – Demographics of responses from all four questionnaires, 29 January 2009
- 18 NHS Islington Paper – Written comments from main questionnaire, 29 January 2009
- 19 Minutes of NHS Islington Board meeting, 29 January 2009
- 20 Letter to NHS Islington from Islington Housing and Adult Social Services, Islington Council, 24 March 2009
- 21 Letter to Cllr Ray (Vice-Chair, Health and Wellbeing Committee) from Islington PCT, 23 October 2008 (attaching maps showing the distribution of patients who use pan-Islington services based at Finsbury Health Centre)
- 22 NHS Islington: Paper – Services relocation consultation distances matrix
- 23 NHS Islington: Paper – Services relocation consultation transport information for sites
- 24 Finsbury Health Centre – comparison of refurbishment and new build options
- 25 David Langdon: Finsbury Health Centre – Camden and Islington community solutions preliminary order of cost Nr.2, 13 January 2009
- 26 Map showing population change in all adults (18+) between 2008 and 2014 by wards
- 27 Islington PCT: Paper - Finance and commissioning sub-committee, 15 July 2008
- 28 Supplementary information provided by NHS London (including: Staff verification form; Notes from staff workshop, 12 February 2008; *Future of healthcare in Islington* leaflets; map showing location of Pine Street building; Table showing backlog maintenance costs for Finsbury Health Centre; Conservation management plan and Management guidelines for Finsbury Health Centre)

Other documentation received

- 1 Letter from *Campaign to Save Finsbury Health Centre*, 14 April 2009 (including: Response to: Results of the public consultation on proposals to relocate some community health services within Islington, 29 January 2009; Notes on population and transport links; Notes on costs for Finsbury Health Centre by John Allan Avanti Architects, April 2009; Letter to Save Finsbury Health Centre Group from from Heritage of London Trust Operations Ltd, 31 March 2009; Letter to NHS Islington from Architects for Health, 26 January 2009; Article by Iona Heath in *British Medical Journal*, 21 February 2009; Article by John Allan (Avanti Architects) for 20th Century Society newsletter)