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Councillor Paul Convery
Chair - Health and Wellbeing Review Committee
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18 MAY 2009

Dear Councillor Convery

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 your letter of 16 February 2009 exercising your statutory powers to formally refer proposals for the closure of Finsbury Health Centre and the relocation of community health services in Islington.

As set out in my letter of 11 March 2009, I asked the Independent Reconfiguration Panel (IRP) to review the proposals put forward by the HWBC for changes to Finsbury health centre and proposals for the relocation of community health services in Islington.

The Panel has now completed its initial review and shared its advice with me. A copy of their advice is appended to this letter. Their advice will be published on their website on 19 May 2009 (www.irpanel.org.uk).

In order to make a decision on this matter, I have considered the concerns raised by your Committee and have taken into account the IRP's advice.

Grounds of referral by HWBC

In your letter of 16 February 2009, your 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; and
- 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.

I also refer to John Foster's subsequent letter to me of 9 March 2009, which outlines how Islington Council, notwithstanding their referral outlined above is anxious to resolve the matter locally. By the time I had received Mr Foster's letter, I had already asked the IRP for their advice on your referral and subsequently passed a copy of his letter to the IRP as part of their review.

Conclusion

Based on what the IRP confirm has been a thorough review of all the documentation provided by both your Committee and the local NHS to underpin its work, essentially the IRP considers the matter can be resolved locally and without the need for a formal review. Having considered all the issues, including both the formal referral and the IRP's advice, I concur fully with this.

I support in full the Panel's conclusion that NHS Islington, NHS London and Islington Council have all indicated that there is scope for further work with a commitment to reach a local resolution.

Whilst the Panel acknowledges the architectural and historical importance of the Finsbury Health Centre, 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 and I completely support this statement.

It is encouraging that all parties are keen to find a solution locally and that steps are being taken towards joint working. Indeed, John Foster's letter of 9 March 2009 expresses your Committee's wish (notwithstanding the formal referral) to still try to seek to resolve the matter locally. The Panel supports this approach and I too would encourage NHS Islington and Islington Council 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; and
- 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. I am fully satisfied the IRP's recommendations for the way forward are in the interests of the local health service. I hope that your Committee will now work together with local NHS partners to ensure these proposals are met and that a local solution can be found.

Yours sincerely
Alan Johnson

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Copy:

Sir Richard Sykes, Chair NHS London

Ruth Carnall, Chief Executive NHS London

Rachel Tyndall, Chief Executive, Islington Primary Care Trust

Dr Peter Barrett, Chair, IRP

John Foster, Chief Executive Islington Council

Emily Thornberry MP

Jeremy Corbyn MP

