Department of Health

From the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

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Councillor Arash Fatemian
Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee,
County Hall,
New Road,
Oxford,
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- 7 MAR 2018

Dear Cllr Fatemian,

Referral of the permanent closure of consultant-led maternity services at the Horton General Hospital

As you know, your Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee's letter of 30 August - about the proposed permanent closure of consultant-led maternity services at the Horton General Hospital - was referred to the Independent Reconfiguration Panel (IRP), to undertake an initial assessment.

The IRP has now completed its initial assessment and shared its advice with me.

IRP advice

The IRP have advised me that further action is required locally before a final decision is made about the future of maternity services in Oxfordshire.

They also concluded that:

- a more detailed appraisal of the options and should incorporate the findings of the latest Clinical Senate review considering the temporary Horton MLU and dedicated ambulance service. Equally important, there is an opportunity to learn from the experiences of mothers, their families and staff who have been involved in the temporary arrangements for more than a year now. This work should also address all the recommendations of the original Clinical Senate Report from November 2016 and the implementation issues that have been left outstanding, in particular how antenatal care is organised and how recommendations to address travel and parking issues will be carried through in practice. Whatever option eventually emerges, it should demonstrate that it is the most desirable for maternity services across Oxfordshire and all those who will need them in the future;

- further detailed work on obstetric options at the Horton is required. In parallel, the dependency that exists between those options and other services can be taken into account. Both pieces of work would benefit from a further external review from a clinical senate to provide assurance and confidence to stakeholders;
- consultation about the future of services, on whatever scale, should take account of patient flows, and not be constrained by administrative boundaries;
- it is self-evidently in the interests of the health service locally that all stakeholders should feel they have been involved in the development of proposals for change. If this was not true of the past, the CCG must ensure that it is so moving forward;
- this requires renewing a joint commitment to learn from recent experience, work together better and create a vision of the future that sustains confidence amongst local people and users of services. It is in everyone's interest that the next phase is commenced as soon as is practicable.

I have accepted the IRP's advice.

I am particularly keen that the OSC and CCG work together to invite stakeholders from surrounding areas that are impacted by these proposals to participate in this debate going forward. This should include the consideration of forming a joint oversight and scrutiny committee covering a wider area (for example, all of the local authorities that took part in the consultation), which would help meet the concerns expressed in the IRP's report of their review.

Where the CCG consults more than one local authority about a proposal, they must appoint a joint overview and scrutiny committee for the purposes of the consultation.

A copy of the full advice is appended to this letter and will be published on the IRP's website at https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/independent-reconfiguration-panel.

I am copying this letter to The Lord Ribeiro, Chair of the IRP.

I have written in similar terms to the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group. I look forward to seeing your joint proposal for taking this work forward.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Hunt

JEREMY HUNT