

16 September 2022

Dear Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee member,

I am writing in regard to the MSK matter itemised under the chair's report for your meeting on Tuesday 22nd September.

1 Disappointment not to have a chair's written report

I want, first, to express my concern that the chair's report will be verbal; a written report is usually available, which allows public access before the meeting to issues they might want to raise.

2 MSK service new contract – from the frying pan into the fire?

MSK services move this autumn from a contract with HealthShare, to a contract with another national provider ConnectHealth. The whole process of procurement – retendering, redrawing the contract and the performance framework, the hand over, the staff, contracts for use of buildings – has not been accessible to the public – no big invitations in the local press to share experiences of the patients who used HealthShare, no open discussion about what would make it better. We first became aware of the change – as a done deal – through Healthwatch, and attended their workshop on line with the new providers.

This workshop did give a space to ask questions – for those involved in Healthwatch and patient participation groups (PPGs), which is not a majority of Oxfordshire patients who need the MSK services. But the contract was by then already sealed. What is perturbing for us in KONP is the total lack of transparency in reletting the contract, and the appalling testimonies on line from users of their services elsewhere in the country. They say nothing better predicts performance than past evidence – in this case it is hard to understand why Connect Health received the contract.

I'm writing to ask that you do a very thorough scrutiny of their first month's work at your November and January meeting, and that you invite much wider public involvement in evaluating ConnectHealth through the press, through Healthwatch, through feedback sheets at their clinics, so that we are not faced with the same problems which faced us with the old providers, HealthShare. This is a service that in our view should be provided inhouse, by the NHS, with NHS staff and in NHS buildings with NHS equipment. Only in this way can a truly flexible service, fit for purpose, and integrated into all the other NHS provision function properly. It goes without saying that this should be properly funded, and adequate numbers of staff paid enough to live in Oxfordshire should be available. Currently this is not, in our view, available – but simply outsourcing to a poor provider who has to make profits out of the same purse that would have been used inhouse with no profits necessary will not solve the problem

We look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,

Bill MacKeith
Secretary, Oxfordshire Keep Our NHS Public