

AGENDA ITEM NO. 14

Extract from Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet of 17 May 2013

A.1: Maternity Services within Clacton and Harwich

The Chairman invited Councillor Ivan Henderson to address Cabinet and to explain his motion, which had been presented to Council on 2 July 2013. Councillor Henderson gave a full and detailed explanation of his motion and explained how important it was to retain maternity services at both Harwich and Clacton. He said that it was important too that women of child-bearing age should have a choice as to where they had their babies and that a 40-mile round trip was not a suitable option. Councillor Henderson confirmed that once he had gone through the papers he had before him he would share any relevant information with Members and Dr Gary Sweeney of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

Dr Shane Gordon, Chief Executive Officer of the CCG introduced himself as a General Practitioner at the Bluebell Surgery at Highwoods and that he had been the Chief Officer for the CCG since April. He explained that the consultation on maternity care was not just about Harwich and Clacton but for all women in Colchester and Tendring and that he would like all maternity care to be of the same standard as provided at Harwich. He said that, over the last ten years, there had been a growth in the birth rate, with no extra midwives being made available, and that there was clear guidance from the Midwifery Council about maternity care needs and the ratio of midwives to women needing maternity care.

Dr Gordon said that no decision had been made yet, that the planned consultation would be about clear choices across Colchester and Tendring and that the consultation was not about removing choice as this was an important part of the giving birth experience. He added that firstly, the principle aim was of improving ratios of having one-to-one care in labour, particularly as most vulnerable people came from Clacton and Harwich. The second aim was, he said, to make best use of resources, with the third aiming to ensure that all options would be based on clear evidence and that hospital evidence would be verified with robust checking to make sure data was correct and ensuring options would not disadvantage any groups concerned.

During questions from Members, concern was raised that the consultation was all about saving money and Dr Gordon reiterated it was about improving local services for local women, however he did confirm that £9 million of NHS funds needed to be saved in the coming year and beyond. Dr Gordon, when asked, confirmed that the consultation process was not due to start until the autumn and the pre-consultation process would make sure the right questions were asked. He confirmed that the Council would have an input into the consultation process, however, the Council would not be able to see the results before publication to all stakeholders and the public. Dr Gordon also added, when asked, that the round trip journey of 40 miles between Harwich and Colchester would be taken into consideration.

Concern was also raised about the consultation only being for women of a child-bearing age as it was felt that women who had never had children would not be able to give a proper opinion and that women past child-bearing age should also be able to add their comments as their experiences could be relevant.

When asked by a Member about the make-up of the commissioning board, Dr Gordon confirmed that just over half of the board of 15 members had a medical background with the others being senior managers with professional experience of commissioning services. He added that the CCG covered a wide area with 43 general practices representing around 323,000 people.

The Chairman thanked Dr Gordon for attending the meeting.

In deliberating over what Dr Gordon had said, Members still felt that the consultation was about cutting costs, even though there had been a 25% increase in births, and that it was about the levelling of services rather than increasing the standards to the level of the Harwich Maternity Unit.

The Chairman summed-up and agreed that Cabinet Members all seemed to be in agreement on the issues and said it had been the correct move to have the original motion to Cabinet as the consultation had not commenced yet.

Having considered this matter, it was moved by Councillor Candy, seconded by Councillor McWilliams and:

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL that:

1. This Council expresses grave concern that patient safety and patient choice could be negatively affected by the possible changes to the maternity services provided in Tendring;
2. The Council therefore commits to lobby at all levels and to use its response to the forthcoming consultation on maternity services to secure an improved service that delivers the best patient choice and patient safety for Tendring families; and

RESOLVED that

3. When the consultation was announced, the Clinical Commissioning Group be invited to attend a meeting of the Community Leadership and Partnerships Committee to help formulate the Council's response to it.