



**PPI Forum
South Western Staffordshire Primary Care Trust
report on:**

**The Proposed Relocation of Penkridge
Health Centre**

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Background

History of the Patient Forums

The NHS exists to serve its patients and public and is accountable to us all. Patient and Public Involvement Forums (PPI Forums) have been set up for every Primary Care Trust and NHS Trust in England from December 2003. This is a new system for involving patients and local people in NHS decision-making and on wider health issues.

There are 572 PPI Forums giving the public a much greater opportunity to get involved in health. In this way, each NHS organisation will have a Forum that relates directly to it, resulting in closer monitoring and closer working between the NHS and the public. Forums will have a remit to look at wider health issues outside the NHS.

The powers and duties of Forums are outlined in the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002 (Sections 15-19). Further information is given in the guidance and in Statutory Instruments 2003, 2123 and 2124 give more details of membership and functions.

The remit for a Forum attached to a Primary Care Trust include;

- Monitoring family practitioner services – that is NHS services provided by GPs, dentists, pharmacists, ophthalmic practitioners and other allied health professionals;
- Reviewing wider public health issues that affect the community and health promotion services;
- Providing support to empower local communities, and in particular excluded groups, to identify issues affecting their health, and take action to influence change on those issues;
- Promoting the involvement of the public in decision making and consultation by local bodies (including Strategic Health Authorities, PCTs, NHS trusts, the local authority and other public bodies);
- **Monitoring how well the NHS is meeting its duty to involve and consult the public, as described under Section 11 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001;**
- Providing independent advocacy services;
- Making available information about making complaints regarding NHS services;

- Representing the views of the public on matters affecting their health.

Adoption onto the Work Programme

A sub group of the forum was set up and discussions followed as to the methodology of the review.

Terms of Reference and Methodology of the Review

During 2004 it became apparent to the PPI Forum South Western Staffordshire PCT that there was considerable concern among patients registered with GPs at the Penkridge Health Centre regarding proposals for relocation of the centre to larger premises. There seemed to be strong feelings that the proposed location of the new premises was unacceptable to many patients. There was also concern about the way in which patient opinion had been taken into account during the process of working up the proposals.

An informal survey conducted by a Penkridge parish councillor has provided evidence that a concern exists. Though this exercise is not a rigorous indicator of the extent of the concern, it is sufficient to suggest that the Forum should respond. Ideally, the Forum's response would have been to make its own evaluation of whether the proposed changes to the Penkridge practice were the best in the circumstances. This could have been done in two ways.

- 1 By conducting its own investigation of the situation and the views of the people concerned.
- 2 By examining the information – including that on patient views - already available, in order to determine whether alternative conclusions might have been drawn,

The first of these approaches would have been an unnecessary duplication of effort. A first step in the latter approach would have been to assess what information was available. However, in view of the concerns about the methodology of the consultation with stakeholders - including doubts as to whether the information available to decision makers was sufficient to allow valid conclusions to be drawn about the relocation of the health centre, the Forum felt that it should begin its work on the issue by looking at the consultation process itself. Therefore, this report of the Forum is concerned solely with the consultation process and does not express any view on the acceptability of the relocation plan itself.

Findings

There have been suggestions that the exercise was not so much consultation as the selling of a solution already finalised. Such an approach to the development of the provision of a public service – where it is important to take proper account of stakeholder views - would not be acceptable. The Forum has not taken any view on these suggestions.

To obtain evidence to enable us to understand the consultation process we have corresponded with the PCT and with the working group of the South Staffordshire District Council. In addition to replies to this correspondence we have considered documentation issued in connection with the meetings held in Penkridge and a report on those meetings. It is understood that an article was prepared for the press by the practice.

A model of good consultation practice would be to state the problem clearly and to communicate this to all stakeholders. Preferably this would be done in a variety of ways and the stakeholders would be given adequate time in which to formulate their opinions. Those who wished to communicate their opinions to the decision makers would be offered a variety of ways of doing this. Finally, the decision makers would study the responses they had received and make – or modify - a proposal which best meets the interests of the stakeholders. Some indication would be given of how stakeholder comments were responded to, particularly where suggestions had been rejected.

It is recognised that real situations do not always allow for an ideal model of consultation to be used. In particular, it is possible that the complexity of a problem means that the large majority of stakeholders would not be in a position to make useful observations, given a blank sheet of paper. In such a situation it might be acceptable to offer possible solutions for stakeholders to comment on. It might even be that only a single solution seems feasible. However, in both of these more pragmatic approaches, it is suggested that stakeholders should be given a fair opportunity to understand and comment on what is being proposed. As stated above, this would include presentation of the information in a variety of ways and allowing for observations to be made in a similar variety of ways.

In the model adopted in Penkridge it appears that the problem was not presented to stakeholders with an invitation to comment, nor were they presented with two or more possible solutions to comment on. These are not **necessarily** weaknesses in this consultation. However, it appears that information about the proposals was presented to stakeholders in only one way – by way of a presentation at a public meeting - and that asking questions or making comments at the meeting was the only way in which stakeholders could express their views. We feel that the absence of a multiplicity of methods of communication to and from stakeholders has been a major weakness in

the consultation process. Further, there appears not to have been a stage in the consultation at which observations made by stakeholders were given careful consideration, with a view to modifying the proposals. While these serious deviations from an ideal model are sufficient to cast doubt on the process, it might be useful to discuss some reasons for this.

With regard to provision of information, it has to be recognised that some people prefer the spoken word as a way of receiving information, but for others it is important to have it in writing, especially if they wish to make a reasoned and measured response. In this respect the submission of an article to the press about the proposed relocation is discounted because there was no guarantee that it would be reported in its entirety, if at all.

Likewise, some people are better at expressing their views orally while others feel that the written word is a more suitable medium, especially if what they have to say is at all complex. While the PCT has said that written comments would have been accepted, there appears to have been no invitation to comment in this way and this may have been sufficient to deter a significant number of people.

Conclusion

It is difficult to evaluate the consultation in terms of what was done with information gathered during the consultation as it is possible that what was collected was only part of the total which might have been collected. It appears that the only responses to views expressed by stakeholders were those made at the public meetings and summarised in the report of those meetings. While it can be appropriate to give some kind of an answer or a comment delivered orally, in person, such responses may not be the considered ones which an ideal model of consultation would require. The conclusion of this report is that the decision to relocate the Penkrige Health Centre to Pinfold Lane may not deliver the optimum outcome for the stakeholders in the process.

Recommendations

We recommend that the consultation process is recommenced with a view to adhering more closely to accepted best practice. The Forum is reluctant to suggest a specific way forward as there are factors not known to it which may affect the best way towards reaching a solution about which stakeholders can be confident. However, the refusal of planning permission for the proposed site does give an opportunity for more than a perfunctory additional exercise in consultation and the Forum would be happy to offer help in ensuring that such an exercise is successful.

Circulation List

Name	Organisation
Chief Executive	South Western Staffordshire PCT
Director of Public Health	South Western Staffordshire PCT
PPI Lead	South Western Staffordshire PCT
Chairman	Scrutiny (Penkridge Health Centre) Working Party
Chairman	Penkridge Parish Council
Practice Manager	Penkridge Medical Centre
Chairman	Health Scrutiny Stafford District Council
Chairman	Health Scrutiny Staffordshire County Council
Chief Executive	Shropshire and Staffordshire Strategic Health Authority
Regional Manager	CPPIH West Midlands
	New Member of Parliament Post Election