

Body: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 4 September 2017
Subject: Maternity Survey
Report of: Peter Finnis, Monitoring Officer and Councillor Robert Smart

Ward(s): All

Purpose: To advise the Scrutiny Committee of the undertaking of a maternity survey, and invite the committee to endorse the way it is being undertaken and, subsequently, receive and debate the resulting outcomes.

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Recommendations: Council to approve the following:

- (a) That the proposed survey and the methodology being used, as set in this report, be approved.
- (b) That the outcomes of the survey be reported to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for due consideration.

1.0 Background and Introduction

- 1.1 In 2014, the three East Sussex Clinical Commissioning Groups issued a consultation document entitled 'Better Beginnings' which, among other things, proposed options for future maternity services. All the options presented would result in either the Eastbourne District General Hospital or Hastings Conquest Hospital losing full consultant led maternity services.
- 1.2 On behalf of the local community, Eastbourne Borough Council submitted a highly detailed and evidence based response arguing the case that both hospital sites should retain these services and expressing strong concerns about patient safety. This response was co-signed by the Leaders of both groups on the Council, the MP, Honorary Freeman Liz Walke, the President of Eastbourne Chamber of Commerce, the Chair of the Eastbourne Hospitality Association, the Chair of the 1066 Country Federation of Small Businesses, the Editor-in-Chief of the Eastbourne Herald, and the Chair of Churches Together. Unfortunately, no response of any kind was received to our

submission and one of the options that resulted in the loss of consultant led maternity services at the Eastbourne DGH was subsequently implemented.

2.0 Current Issues

- 2.1 Since the decision made in 2014, local concerns have remained strong with a number of reported incidents in the local media and via the 'Save the DGH' Campaign Group allegedly arising whilst patients are in transit from Eastbourne to Hastings.
- 2.2 With the service arrangements having now been in place for some time and having regard to ongoing concerns, it seems prudent to undertake direct consultation with those that have experienced the service so as to be able to analyse the impact of the changes on service efficiency and, above all, patient safety.
- 2.3 On the basis that no such research has been undertaken or commissioned, it was proposed by Councillor Smart that the Council should take on this responsibility as a natural follow-up to our previous input, and as the leader of the Eastbourne community. This proposal has received the full support of the Leader, Councillor Tutt. We are aware that, in choosing to undertake this work, we are stepping into the province of the East Sussex Health Scrutiny and Overview Committee. However, this is a matter of particular concern to the Eastbourne area community and it is a part of this Council's Scrutiny Committee remit to scrutinise any issue of wide local concern. Moreover, we would hope that relevant agencies would welcome such research which can help guide future service provision and address any current issues that may be putting patient safety at undue risk.

3.0 The Approach

- 3.1 In order to ensure that this survey would carry due independent legitimacy, Councillor Smart approached the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to propose conducting it under their auspices. This was a somewhat exhaustive process as the governance requirements are rigorous and it is highly unusual for the ONS to sanction an exercise of this type by a local authority. However, the ONS were satisfied as to the reasons for the survey and the governance being proposed, and have approved our proposal. This is unprecedented and very welcome.
- 3.2 The survey focuses on a brief questionnaire (copy attached) which is being sent to all mothers with registered births across East Sussex in 2016. Whilst a key driver here is to assess the impact on Eastbourne area mothers, it is important to be able to analyse the response data in the context of the whole county. Eastbourne DGH is one of two acute hospitals managed by ESHT. (The other being the Conquest where consultant-led maternity has been single-sited, partly on the issue of volume.) ESHT aspires to cater for all residents of East Sussex. Before single-siting, ESHT was responsible for over 4,000 births out of an East Sussex total of just over 5,000. (I.e. the catchment area is much wider than just Eastbourne and volume does affect viability).

4.0 Conducting the Survey

- 4.1 All mothers who registered births across East Sussex in 2016 will receive a questionnaire, an explanatory covering letter and a pre-addressed freepost envelope. A reminder will be sent to non-respondents.
- 4.2 Eastbourne Borough Council produces all the paperwork which is then sent to the ONS. Using their existing data, the ONS will send the correspondence to the consultees. Each questionnaire is uniquely numbered with the numbers corresponding to postcode areas. Thus, we will be able to know the postcode area from the returned questionnaire but the individual identity of the respondent is completely confidential
- 4.3 Questionnaires are returned to the Council and held securely under the supervision of the Monitoring Officer. The information from the questionnaires will then be loaded onto our 'Smart Survey' application according to postcode area. This will enable us to interrogate the data in a large variety of ways to present in the final outcomes report.
- 4.4 A press release has been issued across East Sussex to promote the survey and encourage the highest possible response.
- 4.5 A final outcomes report will be produced and it is anticipated that this should be ready for publication in the Autumn. Scrutiny Committee will be able to analyse and comment on the outcomes on behalf of the Council at their December meeting.

5.0 Consultation

- 5.1 This proposal has been the result of extensive discussions internally involving the Leader of the Council, the Council's Hospitals Champion and the Chief Executive. As a courtesy, we have advised the three East Sussex CCGs, East Sussex Healthcare Trust, the County Council's Director of Public Health, and the East Sussex Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee of this survey. We have committed to make the findings of the survey available to all.

6.0 Implications

- 6.1 Financial – This survey will incur costs of around £20,000 to cover printing, postage, freepost returns, ONS admin costs, and technical support staff time. Corporate Management Team and the Leader of the Council have agreed to make this funding available from existing budgets.
- 6.2 Equality and Confidentiality – This survey is being conducted strictly in accordance with ONS governance in respect of access, equality and confidentiality. All questionnaires are delivered directly to the consultee in hard copy and returnable in a provided freepost envelope. The process ensures complete anonymity of the respondent and is overseen at despatch by the ONS and on receipt at the Council by the Monitoring Officer.
- 6.3 Transparency – The survey outcomes will be presented in a report that will be

fully accessible to the public and shared with all interested agencies and third parties

6.4 Legal – There is a county-wide infrastructure in place to undertake scrutiny of health issues (HOSC) on which Eastbourne Borough Council is represented. However, this does not preclude the Council’s Scrutiny Committee undertaking research in this area where there is a direct impact on the Eastbourne community, especially where the information obtained can help to inform other parties.

6.5 There are no other specific implications arising from this report.

7.0 Summary

7.1 Having made such a huge and controversial change in respect of maternity services in East Sussex, it is crucial that this is monitored as the safety of mothers and children are at stake. We feel that the most relevant research is to obtain feedback direct from mothers who have actual experience of the service. We do not pre-empt the outcomes of this survey but we need to ensure that any significant issues around service quality and patient safety that may have arisen as a result of the current arrangements are highlighted and given due consideration by the responsible agencies.

Peter Finnis

Assistant Director - Corporate Governance and Monitoring Officer

Councillor Robert Smart

Scrutiny Committee Member

Background Papers:

- CCG consultation document ‘Better Beginnings’ 2014
- Council response to CCG consultation 2014
- ONS Application

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