

Mr Ken Gulati
Chair Adults and Health Select Committee
Surrey County Council

8th August 2017

Dear Mr Gulati,

Please take this letter as a formal reference according to our powers under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 from Healthwatch Surrey to the Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee. I write to refer the issue of changes to sexual health services in Surrey and in particular the lack of appropriate engagement and consultation with the public and users of these services.

Healthwatch Surrey believes, based on the facts available to us (which include evidence gathered in face to face engagement with service users and correspondence with Surrey County Council and NHS England commissioners in letters dated 25th May and 22nd June 2017), that engagement and consultation with service users around changes to sexual health services in Surrey, particularly around changes to the HIV services, has not been adequate. We have not seen evidence to date of any substantial engagement with users of HIV services, or evidence of how this feedback has been incorporated into service change. Given the importance of these services to local people and to those who are in vulnerable circumstances, some of whom have complex co-morbidities and needs, we are very concerned at this apparent lack of engagement.

It is our understanding of the legal requirement to consult that this should happen at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage; should give sufficient reasons for change to allow for an “intelligent consideration and response”; give adequate time for that response; and the product of that consultation must be “conscientiously taken into account” and evidenced as such (the Gunning Principles). We cannot see how these requirements have been met to date in the changes to HIV services.

It is our understanding that apart from a survey there was no discussion or engagement with users of HIV services prior to the development of the specification or the re-procurement exercise. Therefore there was no opportunity for user views to be taken into account when proposals were at a formative stage.

Surrey County Council Cabinet at their meeting of 20th March 2017 allowed a six month extension to the timeframe for transfer of services to allow “*appropriate levels of consultation*” which implies to us that there was an acknowledged need for more consultation. It appears to us that the changes involved in the delivery of HIV services are a significant change to services and therefore we do not understand why formal consultation was not required. Even setting aside formal consultation, we cannot see that to date there has been any engagement with service users that would meet the desire expressed by SCC Cabinet for “appropriate levels of consultation”. There are now two meetings planned with service users but these seem to be mainly for the provision of information and they come too late in the day to be a significant opportunity for patient views to help shape the future delivery of the services. That could only have happened much earlier in the process.

We understand that services have to change for a range of reasons. We also understand that people will not always be happy with that change. The remit of local Healthwatch is to ensure that the voice of the user is heard and incorporated into this process. We believe that listening to people that use services can lead to better, more efficient outcomes for all. Therefore engagement and consultation is a good thing to do as well as often being a statutory requirement. On this occasion we do not feel that this engagement and consultation has been adequate.

We have written to commissioners to urge them to provide more time for further engagement to take place, in addition to referring this matter to you for consideration.

I look forward to hearing from you. We will be publishing a copy of this letter and any response on our website.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Scribbins." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Kate Scribbins
Chief Executive

CC: Andy Spragg; Richard Plummer

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