

Rt Hon Andrew Lansley MP, Secretary of State
Secretary of State for Health
Department of Health
Richmond House
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13 May 2011

Dear Andrew

NHS Modernisation – Listening Exercise

Thank you for your recent letter, seeking the views of early implementer Health and Wellbeing Boards on the NHS reforms. We are pleased to contribute the views of the Buckinghamshire shadow Health and Wellbeing Board, which met for its inaugural meeting yesterday.

We welcome your proposals for closer working, and a more integrated approach across public services to improve and protect the health of our communities. Locally, we have made positive and enthusiastic steps in establishing our shadow arrangements. We are starting to build closer links between the key partners involved, and ensuring we take time to develop understanding of the different cultures and ways of working of the broad range of partners involved in the health and wellbeing agenda.

To support our ambitions for a strong, integrated system, we look to the Health and Social Care Bill to provide the framework for clear governance and robust democratic accountability. There is a danger that, without judicious allocation of roles between national bodies and the local Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB), and clearly set out duties and responsibilities of local partners to the HWB, it will be more difficult for the HWB to make decisive and positive impacts on improving the health and wellbeing of our local population. However, with clear legislation setting out a transparent governance framework, and strong local democratic accountability, we are optimistic about the opportunities the HWB offers. We think it is important that a 'duty to co operate' would be a useful strengthening of the role of the HWB

On the role of choice and competition for improving quality, we recognise this is a sensitive area and a range of views are being put forward. We understand and respect the views of some of our Health colleagues who are clearly concerned about the use of private sector providers and a concern about potentially adverse impacts on the NHS. However, the experience of Local Government's dual role as both a commissioner as well as a provider of services should be taken into account. In Buckinghamshire, in our role as a commissioner, we are very experienced in seeking best value and commission services from a wide range of suppliers, from the voluntary sector right through to private sector providers. For example, we, like many other Local Authorities, commission services in Nursing Homes for very vulnerable people. Our role is to ensure the best possible standard of care as well as being as cost effective as possible. To our knowledge, across the South East (and certainly in Buckinghamshire) there are very few public sector providers of Nursing Homes and

this situation has drawn no complaints from across the health sector. So, from a County Council perspective, we support the judicious use of the private sector but within a framework which does not compromise the ability of the NHS to continue to provide a National Health Service, free at the point of delivery but flexible to meet local needs.

Whilst it is early days, we are positive about the development of patient and public involvement via local Healthwatch. Additionally, we are advancing plans for Citizens' jury to complement the other mechanisms available. As the Health and Wellbeing Board develops, we hope to engage in debate about how public involvement can be strengthened even further.

You requested specific input on how advice from across a range of healthcare professions can improve patient care. We consider that the clinical view is a critical one, but it needs to be considered as part of the whole spectrum of professional voices with an input to the health and wellbeing agenda. The views of professions such as therapists and social workers, for example, should be factored in.

Finally, we note the lively debate on the membership of the Future Forum and are encouraged to see that a broader spectrum of membership appears to be being developed, reflecting both the clinical and wider professional input. We agree that this more broadly-based approach is essential.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Birchley
Chairman
Buckinghamshire shadow Health and Wellbeing Board