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19 August 2011

Mr S Courtney
Principal Scrutiny Adviser
Scrutiny Support Unit
Leeds City Council
1st Floor (West)
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Leeds
LS1 1UR

Dear Mr Courtney

Thank you for your letter dated 1st August concerning the above and for the opportunity to comment upon the issues you have raised.

I know the Committee is very well aware of the stage which the National Safe and Sustainable Review of Children's Cardiac Surgery has reached, ie that a final decision on configuration will not be made until the autumn. Given that is the case, my comments in response to your request are necessarily based upon general principles and our experience of leading our existing cardiac network across the North West and North Wales, rather than on any specific discussion which would obviously take place with patients/families, commissioners and provider colleagues across the Yorkshire and Humber region, should that be the final decision of the JPCTC.

I think the first thing to say is that Alder Hey has a long tradition and experience of providing children's cardiac surgery, having first pioneered the techniques in this country during the last century. The current service at Alder Hey is now the third largest in the Country, serving patients and families from North/Mid Wales in the West across to the current Yorkshire border in the East and up to Cumbria in the North. It is important to say that our surgical service is almost unique in the Country, being as it is very much part of a fully integrated Network of cardiac provision that extends across this area, provided with the support and in partnership with cardiology professional teams in hospital centres in Manchester, North Wales, Cumbria and Lancashire.

This Network has been developed over the last 10 years in close partnership with these colleagues, GPs and patient families/support groups. Its primary aim is to provide excellent access to the expert surgical team and services here at Alder Hey at the time children need that surgery and, at the same time, ensure that the highest quality of care is provided on an ongoing basis as close to patients' homes as possible, with the full support and back-up of the team here, if needed by local services.



Your Committee may already be aware that Alder Hey already has the largest dedicated Ronald McDonald Foundation Family House in the Country on site here in Liverpool that provides a “home from home” for families travelling to Liverpool for such operations and we have just extended this facility by a further 23 flats to ensure we can house every family that needs this facility free of charge. Following the review by the Safe and Sustainable Team, we have also strengthened the North West network arrangements still further, with investments in cardiac liaison teams and the introduction of improved IT links, including video-conferencing links, with our partner hospitals. This ensures that most families do not need to travel again to Alder Hey for their on-going cardiac care and follow-up reviews unless they specifically wish to.

As we said in our own response to the consultation in June (see attached), we are totally committed to providing excellent children and family-centred cardiac services as close to patients homes as possible. We believe we already have a strong track record working in partnership with colleagues across the North West and North Wales to achieve just that. We are equally committed to extending that network further, should that be the decision of the JCPCT. If that were to include Yorkshire and Humber in the future, I would wish to assure you that would be done in close co-operation and in the spirit of true partnership with existing practitioners in the area, patients and families and commissioners.

I hope this is helpful. If you require any further detailed information from me at this time, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Louise Shepherd
Chief Executive

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30TH June 2011

Safe and Sustainable
Ipsos Mori
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Dear Safe and Sustainable team

RE: Response to Safe and Sustainable; A New Vision for Children's Congenital Heart Services in England

Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust Board welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation document 'A New Vision for Children's Congenital Heart Services in England'. This letter sets out our strong support for the need for change as outlined by the national Safe and Sustainable Team Review and for the proposals outlined in the consultation document.

The key areas we would wish to comment on as a Board include:

- Principles for change
- Proposals around the change
- Recommended options
- Consultation process

Principles for change

The issues raised over 10 years ago by the Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry which identified the need to develop 'the best' system still hold true and we strongly support the view expressed that fitting this in the 'too hard box' is no longer an option. As one of the leading paediatric providers in the UK we consistently strive for clinical excellence where quality and safety are at the forefront of all we do, thus along with the Royal Colleges and Charities we fully support the principles underpinning this review.

The needs of the child and their family should be central and the quality of the service should be of the highest standard possible across England and Wales. Services should also be delivered as close to home as is possible within the constraints required to deliver this quality of service. We believe the leadership from the Safe and Sustainable team has enabled an objective and balanced approach to tackling these challenging and difficult issues and would wish to acknowledge their work in moving this agenda forward so positively.



Proposals around the change

The assessment that some existing services in the longer term may not be safe or sustainable is central to the proposals laid out and we very much welcome the clarity that the Safe and Sustainable Standards have brought to this debate.

We are delighted that Alder Hey has been put forward as one of the preferred centres within all four potential configurations. In recent years, Alder Hey, along with the North West Cardiac Network, has established an excellent framework of working which fully supports the model of care set out in the proposals.

That said, we fully recognise the need to take on board the Review Team's recommendations for improvement going forward. As a result of that review and our own assessment of the standards expected we have continued to strengthen the service locally over the last year, including:

- Investing further in the existing team; with a 6th cardiologist and 8th intensivist.
- Achieving the minimum required activity this last operational year of 447 cases.
- Investing in a Nurse Consultant post with ANP's and increasing our capacity for nurse liaison.
- Working with the Network to develop stronger clinical leadership, governance and improved communications enabled by IT with specific focus of working with our cardiology networks across North Wales and the North West.

We have also identified exactly how we will develop the capacity we would need going forward to deliver what we strongly believe to be the 'optimum' number of surgical cases for a major centre in the future (between 600 and 650) to keep services both clinically and financially sustainable. This will include the appointment of a fourth surgeon at Alder Hey and the provision of additional theatre capacity.

These investments and developing the network in the way we describe will enable us to work on a wider geographical footprint dependant on the consultation outcomes.

Our own review of the service alongside the Safe and Sustainable standards has also led us to the view that it would make eminent sense to allow every designated Centre to develop local ECMO services to avoid the need for patients to travel unnecessarily for these services in the future.

Recommended Options

To enable our Board to consider the recommendations in the Consultation we have considered the risks and benefits we see from the viable options proposed against three criteria;

- i. strategic alignment to our vision for Alder Hey;
- ii. views of our clinical teams and those of the North West network and UK Children's Alliance about what will make a Safe and Sustainable service in the long-term;
- iii. operationally, which configuration will best deliver a high quality service in this part of the world.



As previously stated, we are delighted that Alder Hey and the North West Cardiac Network is included in all 4 Options being proposed. We are in no position to comment on the relative merits of the different centres outlined in the proposal and would not presume to do so. As previously stated, however, **our strong view, based on a thorough assessment of the service, is that the standards set out by the Review Team will best be met in Alder Hey (and indeed in all Centres) over the long term by us undertaking between 600-650 cases per annum. Our sense would be to urge the JCPCT to make every attempt to try and achieve those numbers in the final configuration of centres.**

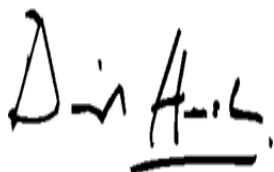
We totally support the clear expectation that strong networks need to be developed across the resulting geographical footprints to support strong local services for patients. Based on our own experience of operating a network in the North West for some years and the recent improvements we have made to that following the Review, we are totally committed to extending that beyond our existing boundaries, in order to meet the final outcome of the Consultation process.

Consultation Process

The consultation process has been extremely informative and has provided the Alder Hey team with the opportunity to engage with many organisations and families providing very valuable feedback and insight into our service. We had good attendance at the formal consultation event in May [158 attendees] and overwhelming attendance at our family open day in June [250 attendees]. We did raise concerns early on regarding the limited level of methods that the public could respond as the on-line and paper questionnaire for many was very complex. As more routes have been opened this has provided an opportunity for more families to comment and show their support in particular for ourselves where we feature in all options [over 1000 responses to the Trust directly and 400,000 re-Tweets via our Twitter campaign]. We also felt strongly about the need to engage children directly in responding and therefore developed our own response form for them engaging with our own Children's Forum and our Children and Young people's Trust members. All local response have been forwarded directly to Ipsos Mori.

We would finally like to express our opportunity to formally respond.

Kind Regards



Sir David Henshaw
Chairman



Louise Shepherd
CEO