

Creating an NHS Fit for the Future

e-bulletin

June 07

About this bulletin

The two Primary Care Trusts in East Sussex (Hastings and Rother & East Sussex Downs and Weald) launched a public consultation of the future of maternity, special care baby and gynaecology services on 26 March 2007.

This bulletin aims to keep you posted on what is happening during the consultation and to up date you about events and information.

PCTs' vision for healthcare

- To improve the health and well-being of their populations.
- To ensure everyone can lead a healthier life and receive timely, safe and convenient treatment.
- To make the best use of all available resources.

What's been happening?

Consultation document – two versions of our document were produced, a full document and a summary one – around 16,000 documents have been circulated since March and we continue to receive requests for copies.

It has been noted that there was an error in the labelling of the graph depicting the number of births in East Sussex Hospitals NHS Trust. An erratum has been produced to replace the original graph together with an addendum that has more up to date figures. These have been published and widely circulated and can be found on the Fit for the Future website, together with pdf versions of the consultation documents that have been amended to reflect this change. These can be accessed at: <http://www.southeastcoastfff.nhs.uk/Home/East-Sussex.aspx>.

Website – the website was launched at the start of the consultation and provides background information, news and dates. There is also a comments form for people who wish to make a response to the consultation online. To date the website has received 3459 visits, which on average is 42 per day. The average length of time spent by each visit is 7 minutes.

Public meetings – 14 public meetings have been arranged in East Sussex. Nine meetings have been held so far, in Seaford, Eastbourne, Hastings, Crowborough, Newhaven, Bexhill and Uckfield, Hailsham and Rural Rother. The meetings have taken the format of 'Question Time' with an expert panel presenting their case

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followed by questions from the floor. Lively debate and a host of questions have been received and we expect more of the same at the remaining meetings. The remaining public meetings are as follows:

Lewes	Monday 18 June 2007	7pm	Assembly Room, Town Hall, Lewes (via Fisher Street) BN27 2DG
Hastings	Monday 25 June 2007	2pm	White Rock Theatre, Hastings TN34 1JX
Eastbourne	Monday 2 July 2007	2pm	Gold Room, Winter Garden, Eastbourne BN21 4BP

Please note that to enable parents with young children to attend the public meetings, we have arranged a crèche facility (free of charge) at the Hastings meeting on 25 June and the Eastbourne meeting on 2 July. Children will need to be booked into the crèche in advance – please contact Jacquie Fuller, Child & Family Care Co-ordinator, NHS Staff East Sussex, 01323 417400 ext 4676 or mobile 07769678532 or email jacqui.fuller@esht.nhs.uk

Attending forums and groups – as well as the large number of public meetings being held the PCTs have written out to a wide range of organisations and groups offering to attend any existing meeting or forum to present and discuss *Fit for the Future*. To date a number of organisations have taken us up on the offer. However, we continue to make our offer and anyone who is interested should email fitforthefuture@esdwpct.nhs.uk

Working with Campaign Groups - The PCTs’ public consultation documents make clear that in addition to the options proposed by the NHS, the PCTs would also “welcome alternative proposals” and would be keen to see, “if there are any realistic, cost-effective and preferred alternatives to those outlined in this document.”

To date the PCTs have received one new proposal, a joint proposal from the *Save the DGH* and the *Hands Off the Conquest* campaigns that is generally referred to as ‘Option 5’.

The PCTs agreed with the campaigners that a New Options Assessment Panel that comprises representatives from the campaign groups and representatives from the PCTs should assess this proposal. This panel first met on 15 May and was independently chaired by Professor Steven Field, Chair elect of the Royal College of General Practitioners (GPs). The same process and criteria will be used to assess any other proposals that emerge during the consultation.

Although ‘Option 5’ has not yet been fully assessed as a viable option, in the interests of openness and transparency, the PCTs have been making this available to inform the consultation process and allow people to form their own judgements on its content.

Learning from other areas

The way in which maternity services are provided in the future is not a subject that is peculiar to East Sussex; areas around the country are working out how best to manage the issues of safety and staffing that offers a safe and sustainable service to their local populations.

A variety of alternative models of service provision were looked at during the preparation of the PCTs' consultation proposals and some ideas will receive additional consideration by the New Options Assessment Panel.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) evidence gathering

East Sussex HOSC has stated a commitment to a full, balanced examination of the available evidence, and consideration of the range of opinion on the proposals before formulating its response to the PCTs after the close of public consultation. As part of this, it has held two evidence gathering meetings and invited key individuals and organisations to give their perspective on the proposal. Two further events are planned:

10am to 1pm Friday 22 June 2007, Council Chamber, County Hall,
Lewes

10am to 1pm Wednesday 25 July 2007, Council Chamber, County Hall,
Lewes

More information is available on the HOSC's website at www.eastsussexhealth.org

A reminder about about why we are consulting

Why we need to change:- there are two key issues driving this consultation:-

- **Safety** – for consultant-led units, safety is improved by increasing consultant presence on the labour ward; having consultants providing the decision-making and supervision on complex procedures; and ensuring that doctors do not work excessive hours.
It is hard to achieve these in smaller units and in future, units delivering less than 2500 babies each year may not be able to treat high-risk obstetric cases or multiple births. – see Facts and Figures below.
- **Staffing** – with doctors and midwives working across two hospital sites at present, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain adequate staffing levels; changes to junior doctor training means less hours available and less experienced doctors on duty. It is not as simple as just employing more consultants. This is because the more consultants there are, the fewer mothers and babies they see, and the more difficult it is for doctors to keep up their skills to offer a high quality service.

The PCTs believe that there is a case for change around childbirth services, in order to make sure they are safe and sustainable.

Facts and figures

The number of births at the two hospitals were as follows:

Year	Eastbourne DGH	Conquest, Hastings
2005/06	1820	1620
2006/07	1952	1752

It is clear that each unit does not currently undertake enough births to meet national guidelines and qualifies as a 'smaller' unit.

Two thirds of all deliveries are unassisted – there is no consultant involvement. That means that there are fewer than two births a day, on average, at each hospital, that require specialist medical intervention. It is essential that consultants undertake enough births to maintain their skills and Royal College guidance suggests that less than 2500 births in one unit per year is not sufficient to do this.

A number of people have questioned the East Sussex population projections. The PCTs have worked with East Sussex County Council, using their projected figures for the next ten years. Whilst these suggest an overall population increase, the number of women of childbearing age (and, therefore, the number of babies) is expected to fall by about 8%. This does not mean the PCTs are planning for a decrease in the numbers of births, just that the figures do not indicate a need to expand the service.

What are the proposals?

- A consultant-led obstetric unit at either Eastbourne District General Hospital or the Conquest Hospital, Hastings.
- Consider a new midwife-led unit on the site that does not have the consultant-led obstetric unit.
- Provide emergency and planned in-patient gynaecological care at the same hospital that has the consultant-led obstetric unit.
- Provide ante-natal, post-natal care, out-patients and day case treatment at both hospitals.
- Retain Crowborough birthing centre in all options.

Frequently Asked Questions

There have been a large number of recurring questions asked during the consultation. We have put together a Frequently Asked Questions sheet which is available on the website www.southeastcoastfff.nhs.uk/Home/East-Sussex/FAQs.aspx.

What we have heard so far

Travelling times and transport are a concern

There is little or no evidence on the impact of travel times in labour on safety. The journey time between Eastbourne and Hastings is similar to the journey time already experienced by other East Sussex residents living in rural areas, and to that in many other communities.

Other midwife-led units operate up and down the country with similar transfer times to their nearest consultant-led unit.

We are working with local authorities and the ambulance service to improve access.

“Mothers want consultant-led births”

Many mothers will continue to choose consultant-led care, but the recent Department of Health report “Maternity Matters” affirms that 80% of women want choice about the type of care they receive; pregnancy and birth are normal life events for most women; women must be given the information to allow informed decision-making. This means that we need to think about all types of care; obstetric led units, midwifery led units and home births, and explore how best to make these safely available to women in East Sussex.

“No evidence that changes will improve care”

Increasing the presence of consultant obstetricians on the labour ward has been shown to reduce both caesarean rates and complications of delivery, a major contribution to improving safety for women and babies.

Combining skills and resources on a single site would avoid many of the unplanned closures of units that arise due to staffing shortages or other unforeseen circumstances.

More complex births would be looked after in East Sussex rather than women having to travel elsewhere for their care.

Scepticism – “it’s all about cuts!” – “it’s all been decided”

We need to make best use of all our resources – staff, equipment, buildings and money. Both the PCTs and the East Sussex Hospitals NHS Trust are working together to improve value for money and to tackle historic deficits. Plans must, therefore, be affordable. However SAFETY is the main reason we need to change.

We must emphasise that no decisions have been made and the PCT Boards are not restricted to the initial options set out in the consultation documents. In fact they expect and welcome new ideas – this is one of the reasons for an open public debate.

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The PCTs are committed to supporting the development of alternative proposals, which will be subject to the same scrutiny as the options in the document. Alternative options cannot become 'official' options until the PCTs are sure they are realistic and could work.

Everyone values the hospitals in Eastbourne and Hastings

The PCT Boards are committed to sustaining two viable hospitals with a full range of 24 hour emergency services. This will be included as a criterion for helping the PCT Boards make a final decision

What happens next?

The consultation will run until 27 July, followed by a period of analysis. This will be undertaken by an independent analyst who will work through all the responses received and will provide a report for the PCT Boards.

A full comparative assessment of every realistic, safe and cost-effective option that has been proposed will be undertaken to determine which option offers the best service for the people of East Sussex.

It is likely the PCT Boards will make a joint decision in the Autumn and that any changes will be implemented during 2008/2009.

We want your views

There are a number of different ways in which you can make a response to this consultation:

Complete the questionnaire at the back of the consultation document and post to the Freepost address.

Go to www.southeastcoastfff.nhs.uk and complete the response form online.

Email: fitforthefuture@esdwpct.nhs.uk.

Text *SUSSEX* plus your response to 07786 200350

Future bulletins

We are committed to keeping everyone informed on how the consultation is progressing and we will issue further bulletins in due course.