

Healthwatch Gloucestershire
Waterwells Business Park
Kestrel Court
Waterwells Drive
Quedgeley
Gloucester GL2 2AT

Tel: 01452 504989
Freephone: 0800 652 5193
info@healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk
www.healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk

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Becky Parish
Associate Director, Engagement and Experience
NHS Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group
Sanger House
Valiant Court
Brockworth
Gloucester
GL3 4FE

Dear Becky

Forest of Dean: Consultation

I am writing on behalf of Healthwatch Gloucestershire about the recent consultation on community hospital facilities in the Forest of Dean. Healthwatch Gloucestershire is the county's independent health and social care champion and we exist to ensure that people are at the heart of care. We have taken a keen interest in the consultation which was delivered by NHS Gloucestershire (the commissioner) and Gloucestershire Care Services NHS Trust (the provider). This has taken the form of attending a number of the presentations and 'drop-ins' as well as reviewing the information available to the public. Our observations of the consultation are reflected below and we hope that these will be useful in your analysis of the outcomes of the consultation.

1. Healthwatch Gloucestershire was impressed by the high level of preparation that had gone into the consultation which provided a good opportunity for residents of the Forest of Dean to participate and share their views. The consultation included a range of ways for people to have their say including attending public meetings, visiting an information bus, and drop ins - all delivered in local venues. There was also an online option to share views via a survey. We were impressed by the number of face-to-face opportunities for engagement with nearly 100 people present at the Lydney meeting and a high number of drop-ins. Every presentation we attended was handled professionally including when there was robust challenge

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and questioning by local people.

2. The consultation was supported with good quality information which explained the 'case for change', background, FAQs, and the options. We were impressed by the dedicated website which provided clear and very comprehensive information. The audio-visual content was useful for those who like to access information in this way as was the easy-read documentation.
3. The information available clearly set out the preferred option of the commissioners and the provider and invited local people to say whether or not they agreed with this option. We believe that taking such a clear position is helpful.
4. The number of beds available was a prime source of questioning at the public meetings we attended. Most people seemed assured by the explanation that a reduced number of beds would be sufficient to meet needs given the availability of other community health services. However, there was genuine concern about where those who currently use the additional beds (primarily from Gloucester) would go. Answers to the latter question were not completely clear or consistent, with one presentation suggesting that the number of beds in the county as a whole was not being reduced. Future consultations and information may well need to include some greater clarity and deal with with a wider population - primarily in the Gloucester/Cheltenham area, where there are no community hospitals.
5. Related to the above, we observed that people wondered whether sufficient account had been taken of future population increases in the Forest of Dean. It will be important to demonstrate, in any future consultation, that this issue has been carefully analysed.
6. Very strong views were expressed on the provision of maternity services, where they would be provided, and whether they would be accessible. Concerns were particularly strong in more remote areas of the Forest.
7. Transport links to a new community hospital (as well as to Gloucester and Cheltenham) seemed to be a clear area of concern during the discussions we observed. Given that many public transport links are poor in parts of the Forest the challenge will be to arrive at criteria and a recommendation for location which takes into full account the challenges presented by transport provision.
8. Related to the above, it will be important that car parking for a possible new hospital is carefully considered. We know that car parking charges and availability of spaces (including spaces for disabled car users) is often an issue for patients and visitors at hospital sites.
9. We noted that some people were not clear about the ownership of the Dilke and Lydney community hospitals and questioned whether they could be transferred to NHS Property Services. Furthermore, people wanted to know what would happen to any buildings which were 'surplus' to requirements in the future. Any future consultations will need to clearly address these issues.
10. The consultation included a proposal to establish a panel of citizens to consider the location of a possible new hospital. Clearly it will be important that the members of the panel can represent the diversity of the community in the Forest of Dean. Healthwatch Gloucestershire recommend that the members of the panel include

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people who have lived in the Forest for a shorter period of time as well as long-time residents.

We hope that these observations and reflections are useful to you. We look forward to learning about the next steps so that Healthwatch Gloucestershire can decide on the role it can play to support and promote the involvement of local people in the decision making process.

Yours sincerely



ALAN THOMAS
Interim Chair
Healthwatch Gloucestershire

