

# REPORT OF THE TASK/FINISH PANEL ON FUTURE HEALTHCARE PROPOSALS FOR KNUTSFORD AND CONGLETON

## Introduction

At its meeting on 29 July 2009, the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee established a Task/Finish Panel to consider and make recommendations on the proposals by Central and Eastern Cheshire Primary Care Trust (PCT) for future healthcare provision in Knutsford and Congleton.

The Committee established a Task/Finish Panel comprising:

Councillor Dorothy Flude (Chairman)  
Councillor Gordon Baxendale  
Councillor Shirley Jones  
Councillor Tony Ranfield  
Councillor Andrew Thwaite  
Councillor George Walton

The Panel had the following Terms of Reference:

“To exercise the Health Scrutiny function in relation to the Central and Eastern Cheshire Primary Care Trust’s proposals regarding future healthcare in Knutsford and Congleton.

*(the role of health scrutiny is to comment upon:*

- *Whether as a statutory body, it has been properly consulted;*
- *Whether, in developing the proposals for service changes, the consulting body has taken into account the public interest through appropriate patient and public involvement and consultation;*
- *Whether the proposals are in the interests of the local health service).”*

## Background and history

The Primary Care Trust, working with GPs, had introduced a programme to develop new and comprehensive healthcare provision throughout its patch. This reflected the need for Health Services to adapt to meet changing needs (such as the expected doubling of the over 85s age group by 2020); took on board opportunities offered by new technologies; and recognised that most people wished to remain independent and in their own homes for as long as possible.

The PCT, together with local GPs, wanted to provide more services locally and recognised that this meant bringing services together into shared premises. It is not affordable to duplicate advanced diagnostic and treatment facilities across different GP practice locations nor is it desirable to continue to provide services in relative isolation from other service providers. Existing

surgeries cannot be expanded or modified to accommodate the additional services and meet health and safety legislation.

### Knutsford

The PCT's specific proposals for Knutsford therefore meant the provision of modern purpose built premises:

- Bringing together three GP practices – Toft Road Surgery, Manchester Road Medical Centre and Annandale Medical Centre;
- Providing a comprehensive range of clinics and out-patient services to provide local care for people with long-term conditions and disabilities or those requiring follow up to hospital treatment;
- An extended range of diagnostic services and test facilities to provide prompt and convenient diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of health concerns;
- Integrated services with Cheshire East Council;
- Intermediate services aimed at:
  - supporting people in their own homes;
  - providing community hospital beds to avoid unnecessary acute hospital admissions;
  - supporting earlier discharge from acute hospitals.

### Process during 2008 - 2010

The PCT had followed a procurement process that saw GPI appointed as the developer for the Knutsford healthcare project.

The Panel heard from Andrew Caldwell of GPI who explained that GPI was a local third party developer of primary care premises. Primary care centres were funded through public finance and GPI would take on all risks until financial close. They would build the premises then lease the building to the GPs and Primary Care Trust on a lease agreed with the District Valuer, meaning that GPI would retain ownership of the building.

It was envisaged that a site of 2 – 2.5 acres was needed for the Knutsford project. A long list of potential sites was produced by GPI and discussed with local GPs and the PCT. This long list was then reduced to 5 sites that were notified to the Community Panel and local press. (A Community Panel had been established by the PCT in August 2008 to act as a point of contact between the PCT and local people). None of the sites was currently for sale. The site owned by Aldi was favoured but the company was not interested in selling. The remaining 4 sites were scored and rated and Shaw Heath identified as the best site. The three sites of Shaw Heath, the Town Centre site (comprising the Community Hospital, Bexton Court and the Stanley Centre) and the Golf Club were all then appraised in more detail.

Meetings had been held with planning and highways officers from Macclesfield Borough Council, regarding site issues, up to 1 April 2009

when Cheshire East Council came into being. The conclusion was that Shaw Heath would be the simplest site to develop as a healthcare centre. There could also be mutual benefit derived from relocating the services currently provided on the Town Centre site to Shaw Heath. A formal Consultation Process was begun by the Central and Eastern Cheshire Primary Care Trust on 1 September 2009. The consultation was suspended at the end of October 2009 when the PCT was advised by Cheshire East Council that the site at Shaw Heath was no longer available.

The Task/Finish Panel has undertaken visits to the 3 shortlisted sites:

- The site at the Golf Club was not considered to be a viable proposition and the Panel did not support any further consideration of this site as a location for the new premises;
- The Town Centre site – this site is in a central location close to a number of other existing facilities, it is accessible for people attending on foot, it is a location that local people are familiar with visiting for health and social care needs; however, parking appears limited and excessive traffic may cause highway difficulties in an area of narrow streets and residential properties;
- Shaw Heath – this is a 7 acre site which the Panel feels could easily accommodate all the services which the PCT/local GPs/the Local Authority wanted to provide as well as having potential for future expansion to meet future needs; the Panel would support the retention of the Household Waste Recycling Centre on the site; a Transport Plan would be required.

From visiting the sites, the Panel's preferred site is Shaw Heath. The Panel invited Councillor P H Mason, the Portfolio Holder for Procurement, Assets and Shared Services, L Quinn, Borough Treasurer and Head of Assets and A Pritchard, Assets Manager to a meeting in February 2010 to seek information as to whether site issues could be resolved and the project could resume. The Panel was advised that there was a commitment among officers of relevant council departments to work with officers from the Primary Care Trust to try to make progress with the Knutsford project and a meeting would be set up with relevant officers to discuss a way forward.

### Congleton

This project aimed to bring together 3 existing GP practices onto a new site with enhanced facilities. The War Memorial Hospital, Congleton would have an increased number of intermediate care beds but diagnostic and out patient services could move to the new provision.

An exercise had been undertaken to assess and then weight a shortlist of theoretically available sites. This had resulted in the Fairground site (in the town centre adjacent to the library and police station) being identified as the preferred site and this development would be part of a whole new

town centre development. The Panel visited the Fairground site. No formal consultation was undertaken.

#### Position from May 2010

In May 2010, the Primary Care Trust issued a Premises Statement that stated that projects in a number of areas, including Knutsford and Congleton, would be put on hold until at least autumn 2010, unless the developments could be made cost neutral in real terms. In the light of this statement, the Panel suspended its work for a temporary period.

In September 2010, the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee was consulted on the temporary closure of the Tatton Ward, Knutsford Hospital, due to difficulties in providing appropriate medical cover at the site. Cheshire East Cabinet on 18 October then approved the related temporary closure of Bexton Court, which provided Social Care services from the same site, and shared some support facilities with East Cheshire Trust (ECT). Outpatient services by Cheshire and Wirral NHS Partnership Trust and Cheshire East Community Health were also delivered from the hospital site.

A report was then submitted to the PCT Board on 30 November 2010 with a number of recommendations on current “on hold” primary care premises projects. It was recommended that the original project for a new build integrated health facility in Knutsford be stopped on the basis that the PCT should continue to work with the GP Practices and the Council to understand what could be done to develop patient services. In relation to Congleton, the new build project was also to be stopped but there could be a possible alternative “supersurgery” scheme.

This Panel then resumed its work and has held a number of meetings. The Panel has visited the Knutsford Hospital site and been advised about current services available at the site from both health and social care providers. Members have received progress updates from officers of the East Cheshire Hospital Trust, Primary Care Trust and Adult Social care. The Panel has also considered information and views from the Knutsford Town Plan Implementation Committee on the temporary closures. The Panel understands local GPs are now interested in revisiting the future healthcare proposals in Knutsford and, in view of their future role as commissioners of services, will have an important role in influencing decisions about future local service provision.

The Panel is also aware of changes in social care including a move away from building based services, increasing use of personalised budgets and the potential for a new specialised dementia facility in the north of the Borough. Members have been advised about a number of property related reviews underway by the Council, covering the future location of Independent Living Teams/Centres; Lifestyle Facilities and library buildings. It is important that the potential release of buildings is taken

account of when assessing the need for new facilities for health and social care.

The Panel was advised that specialist consultants had been commissioned by the PCT to gather the views of the major stakeholders in Knutsford and propose a way forward and a possibly modified scheme. Their work was completed by the end of February and a stakeholder meeting was held on 1 March to outline findings. The Panel understands that the outcome of the meeting was positive and it was felt that there was great potential for future provision of services in Knutsford. However, more time is needed before any firm proposals can be developed. In the meantime, a doctor has been appointed who will start with the Hospital Trust in April.

The Panel is aware that the Knutsford Community Hospital is a highly valued facility by the local community and is pleased to hear that there is real potential for future service provision in Knutsford. The Panel welcomes the joined up approach by all parties and hopes that partners can work together to contribute to a vision for future health and social care service delivery in Knutsford which can then be translated into some real service improvements.

In relation to Congleton, the Panel is pleased to hear that an alternative “supersurgery” scheme involving the former Borough Council offices may be possible as it is under active consideration by developers as part of the Town Centre development scheme. However, at this stage no further details are known.

### Conclusion

The Panel is disappointed with the outcome for Knutsford given the resources that had previously been committed to developing the project. It has been difficult to finalise its report and come to conclusions due to delays arising during the General election period, financial difficulties of the PCT and then the coalition Government’s proposals for substantial change in the NHS.

However, it now appears that there are new opportunities to develop both health and social care provision in Knutsford in the light of renewed interest from local GPs and possible opportunities arising from changes in health and social care and referred to earlier in the report. It appears that a new vision for health and social care can be developed in the Knutsford area and the Panel strongly supports this.

The Panel hopes that health and social care provision in Congleton can similarly reach a successful conclusion.

The Panel is grateful to all who have contributed to its work in particular Geoff Wood (PCT), Sandra Shorter (Adult Social Care, Cheshire East

Council), Val Ahearne (East Cheshire Hospital Trust) and Denise French (Scrutiny Team, Cheshire East Council).