

Councillor Rob Cook
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27 August 2021

Ann Heppenstall
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Dear Ann

MCKENZIE GROUP – PROPOSED CLOSURE OF HARTFIELDS MEDICAL PRACTICE

I refer to the Stakeholder Briefing dated 19 July 2021 which outlined the McKenzie Group's proposal to permanently close Hartfield's Medical Practice, which is based at Hartfield's Extra Care Village in Hartlepool.

As a key stakeholder the Audit and Governance Committee met on the 27th August 2021 to progress the formulation of its engagement response. The Committee received evidence from both the NHS Tees Valley Clinical Commissioning Group and McKenzie Group and welcomed views and comments from Healthwatch, residents and the Town's MP.

With due regard to the information available the time of the meeting, the following outlines the Committee's formal response to the engagement process, the deadline for which is 29 August 2021.

- i) Equitable access to GP services is a fundamental right and the closure of the Hartfield's Practice would not be in the best interests of those patients registered at the practice or those registered with the wider McKenzie Group. Particularly in relation to:
 - Difficulties in making and accessing appointments and other services (including prescription services) that will be exasperated by the loss of the surgery:
 - Whilst the McKenzie Group indicated that they had increased the number of appointments provided over the last 12 months from 134,000 to 173,000, it is clear that the data is not reflective of lived experiences with numerous examples of failed attempts to contact the surgery by phone. It is felt that the loss of the Hartfield's surgery will compound this problem.

- Difficulties in physically accessing GP services (including prescription services). It is felt that the needs of patients must be paramount and that consideration has not been given to the implications for vulnerable residents living in Hartfield's and in the wider community. Of particular concern is access to transport (difficulties in accessing bus services, expensive taxis and availability of only one wheelchair accessible taxi in Hartlepool) and digital exclusion (increased reliance on computer services for prescriptions, etc.).
 - It is felt that the new housing planned for the surrounding area (500+) supports the need for the retention of the practice. Whilst evidence provided indicated that there had been 'spare' appointment capacity at the surgery pre-covid, it was felt that this spare capacity would accommodate the potential increase in patient list size resulting from new housing provision.
- ii) Options have not been explored for the provision of alternative accommodation on the Hartfield's site to meet the requirements of the McKenzie Group and allow the surgery to stay in its current location. Whilst this had not been explored for the Hartfield's site, the Committee noted with concern that options for modifications at other sites had been explored in order to increase capacity elsewhere to accommodate the transfer of patients from the Hartfield's Practice.
- iii) It is noted that the APMS contract relates to both the Hartfield's (as a branch) and Wynyard Practice and that a variation to the contract is being sought. The CCG clarified that whilst interest had been expressed by other GP Practices to continue the provision, the nature of the contract is such that the two cannot be separated without a full recommissioning of the whole contract. Whilst the Committee note the position, the question remains as to why other practices consider accommodation adequate for the provision of services and the McKenzie Group does not.
- iv) The engagement process is flawed. Digital exclusion is again relevant with indications that not all residents have received letters or have access to, or knowledge of, appropriate technology (smart phones, computers). In addition to this, it is felt that:
- There has been a lack of support for those residents who need assistance in completing the survey; and
 - No options are included in the engagement survey and there is no opportunity for elaboration in terms of views.
- v) Completion of a full engagement and consultation process is required, with agreement designation of the proposal as a substantial variation of service. As part of this, the full results of the engagement are to be presented to the Audit and Governance Committee.

I hope the above is of assistance and should you require any clarification, or further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



COUNCILLOR ROB COOK
CHAIR OF AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE