

NORTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Northern Health and Social Services Council held at 1.30pm in Magherafelt District Council Offices on Wednesday 10 May 2006.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Mr Tom Creighton

Members: Mr Jim Brown Mrs Noreen McClelland
Mrs Liz Johnston Mrs Kate McEldowney
Mr Danny Kinahan Mr Mark Nolan
Mr John Millar Mrs Kate Swain
Mrs Rae Morrison

In Attendance: Mr Noel Graham
Mrs Jacqui Erwin
28 members of the public – agenda item 7

56/06 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Mrs Adger, Mrs Anderson, Mrs I Johnston, Professor Kernohan, Mrs Montgomery, Mrs McCambridge, Mr McClelland, Mr Nicholl, Mr Quinn and Mr Wilson.

57/06 **CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS**

The Chairman commented upon his attendance at United Hospitals Trust Board Meeting and thanked Mr Millar for attending Homefirst Community Trust Board Meeting.

He reminded members to forward a copy of their car registration certificate to the office and called for outstanding Members' Declared Interest forms to be completed.

58/06 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 APRIL 2006**

The minutes were agreed and signed.

59/06 **MATTERS ARISING FROM MEETING OF 5 APRIL 2006**

44/06 Breast Screening Services

Mr Graham had written to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety voicing concern that early detection opportunities are being lost and that diagnosis is being missed or delayed until symptoms develop due to the unavailability of a screening service since October 2005 for women aged 50-64 in the NHSSB area. A further concern highlighted was the shortage of skilled staff to provide a full service throughout Northern Ireland. The Council sought assurances that the problems highlighted in the Wilson Report are being addressed as a matter of urgency.

In a response the Permanent Secretary, Dr McCormick, indicated that the Minister was considering what action needed to be taken on foot of the Wilson Report and the related report from the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority. He confirmed that a consultant breast radiologist had taken up post at Antrim Hospital from the beginning of February 2006, however, as recommended by the Wilson Report single handed working must be avoided and arrangements were being made to ensure this does not happen in the future.

He added that the Department was urgently considering how a quality breast screening programme which is both sustainable and equitable can be maintained across Northern Ireland. However, this is against a backdrop of a chronic shortage of breast radiologists in Northern Ireland and the UK in general. Also taking place is the further development of the skill mix for health professionals working in breast screening and enhanced training particularly for radiographers.

Dr McCormick confirmed that the Department is fully committed to the re-establishing of a quality breast screening programme to women aged 50–64 in the Northern Health and Social Services Board area as soon as is possible.

Members had anticipated that the Report being produced by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority would have already been in the public domain.

Mr Graham drew attention to the illness of a Consultant Oncologist from Belfast City Hospital which had resulted in twenty nine breast cancer patients from Antrim Area Hospital experiencing delays in the start of the oncology phase of their treatment. Mr Graham informed the meeting that he had put across the Council's concerns on an interview with Good

Evening Ulster. Members were dissatisfied, however, that Council had only become aware of the situation through the media.

During discussion concerns were voiced about a lack of public confidence in Antrim Hospital and inequality for women living in the Northern Board.

Members were gravely concerned about the situation and would continue to review it.

44/06 Integrated Clinical Assessment and Treatment Services (ICATS)

No date had yet been agreed for the first meeting of the ICATS Public Awareness Group.

44/06 Proposed Relocation of Whitehouse Medical Practice

Mr Graham confirmed that the Northern Health and Social Services Board would consider papers at its Senior Managers Team meeting on Tuesday relating to Whitehouse Medical Practice's application to relocate its surgeries from the Whitewell Road to the Abbey Centre at Newtownabbey. He also referred to a petition in the area opposing the relocation.

44/06 Presentation on Ambulance Services

The Council had written to the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service seeking information to enable a more informed case to be put forward for additional funding. An acknowledgement letter had been received.

44/06 Consultation on United Hospitals Trust Policy on Pay Car Parking at Antrim Hospital

Members noted that United Hospitals Trust would be amending the policy on pay car parking at Antrim Hospital to reflect the many valid comments received during the consultation period. An amended policy would be considered at the May Trust Board meeting.

53/06 Launch of the Floating Support Pilot Project for Ethnic Minorities in the Northern Board area

The aims of the project include identifying suitable and appropriate language provision, referral for English classes,

orientation and guidance for people settling in the new area, identifying, sourcing and referring to healthcare providers and access and referral to advice, support and counselling, where appropriate, for the victims of racial harassment and intimidation. Promotional materials and a website are being developed.

53/06 Project Board – Shipman Inquiry

Mr Graham indicated that Mrs Cairns, Chair of the Southern Health and Social Services Council, would attend the first meeting and report back through the Health and Social Services Councils for Northern Ireland Executive Committee on the need for a member to attend future meetings.

53/06 GMS Clinical Governance Partnership

Mr Millar, Mr Nolan and Mr Graham had expressed an interest in membership of the GMS Clinical Governance Partnership, however, no further details had been received.

54/06 Speechmatters Funding

The Council had raised the ceasing of funding for Speechmatters with the Northern Health and Social Services Board and Homefirst Community Trust. The Board had indicated that it would be looking at alternative arrangements with Homefirst Community Trust to address the needs of those who had received a service from Speechmatters. When raised by the Council at the joint meeting with Homefirst Trust the Trust seemed unaware of this.

60/06 CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT and PATIENT CLIENT COUNCIL **61/06 PROJECT TEAM UPDATE**

Joint Council Seminar

Mr Graham referred to the recent Joint Council Seminar when the morning session had been dedicated to the Northern Ireland response to the Shipman Inquiry Recommendations and the afternoon session to presentations by the four Chief Officers on the recommendations developed to date on the functions, role and responsibilities of the new Patient Client Council.

Equality

In terms of meeting equality legislation Mr Graham reported that all statutory authorities are obliged to review their Equality

Schemes after five years. A joint Northern Health and Social Services Board/Council Review will be submitted to the Equality Commission.

Office Premises

Mr Graham updated members on the position with the office premises.

Patient Client Council

Mr Graham reported that at the last meeting of the Patient Client Council Project Team consideration had been given to amendments, submitted by Chief Officers, to the Instructions to Counsel together with a paper, prepared by Chief Officers, outlining a proposed structure. Chief Officers had now been asked to have a further look at functions presently outsourced or supplied on a no-cost basis and to consider a paper on advocacy. He also reported that a DHSSPS workshop was taking place today for all project team members involved in the Review of Public Administration.

Chief Officers were also meeting with major political parties and NHSSC had commissioned stakeholder engagement across ten umbrella groups and their associated membership. Two of the Chief Officers would also host a workshop as part of a consultation exercise being undertaken by the Community Development and Health Network on behalf of the Health and Social Services Councils on patient and client advocacy in the new Patient and Client Council.

62/06 **UNITED HOSPITALS TRUST PAPER ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO PATIENT SERVICES AT WHITEABBEY AND MID-ULSTER HOSPITALS PRIOR TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DEVELOPING BETTER SERVICES**

In order for the Council to respond with the views of those living in the Magherafelt and Cookstown areas lists of community groups were obtained from the respective District Councils and each was issued with a short questionnaire. Of the 81 groups contacted 10 responded. The majority were unaware of the risk assessment and options considered by United Hospitals Trust and viewed the proposed reduction in accident and emergency opening times as a serious concern. Most accepted there were risks in retaining the services mentioned without back-up and support and thought there were other options the Trust could have considered. The majority did not support the actions proposed by the Trust and

felt that not enough information had been made available by the Trust to explain its proposed actions.

The opportunity was extended to those who had responded and to representatives of the Save the Mid-Ulster Hospital Campaign to raise their concerns directly with members at the Council meeting.

Mr Creighton extended a warm welcome to those joining the meeting and invited them to put forward their views on United Hospitals Trust proposals for the Mid-Ulster Hospital.

Ms Foster, representing the Save the Mid-Ulster Campaign, thanked the NHSSC for the opportunity to tell members how totally opposed campaigners were to the proposed changes. She referred to the short consultation period and to the risk assessments undertaken at Whiteabbey and Mid-Ulster Hospitals and queried if a similar exercise had been undertaken at Antrim Hospital. She described Mid-Ulster Hospital as having a 'clean bill of health' in terms of the endoscope incident and called for services to be enhanced rather than downgraded. If the proposals were adopted people west of the Bann would be left with only one twenty four hour Accident and Emergency Department therefore denying them the right to accessible and equitable services.

Ms Foster referred to the proposed closure of the Accident and Emergency department at 11.00pm each evening and queried what would happen to patients triaged and in the waiting area at that time, to inpatients and to those requiring to be stabilised. She voiced concern that Northern Ireland Ambulance Service staff would be forced to step in even though the service is already overstretched and the continuation of the current level of funding doubtful.

Ms Foster explained that Mid-Ulster Hospital had a catchment area of 720 square miles which is mostly rural and believed the proposals were all about saving money. She blamed United Hospitals Trust for the inability to recruit staff and queried what would happen to staff currently employed in the Mid-Ulster Hospital to provide those services which the Trust was proposing to transfer. She drew attention to a letter sent in March 2006 by the Chief Executive of United Hospitals Trust to General Practitioners in the area alerting them to the pressure on beds in Antrim Hospital and telling them to divert patients to other services or hospitals. If this was the situation in March she feared for what it would be like if the proposed changes

were implemented. She reminded members of the Campaign's slogan 'Your Life, Your Family's Life at Risk'.

Health campaigner, Mr Taylor, said the health service was in a fearful mess and highlighted some research findings. He referred to the use of telemedicine links and the perception that these would make a hospital safe. However, he pointed out that such links required the appropriate specialists to be employed. He drew attention to the need to have minor injuries, accident and emergency and emergency medical services together and the necessity to have a medical emergency team in the Mid-Ulster Hospital. He also pointed out that according to guidelines for critical care in Northern Ireland there was not one ambulance, outside of Belfast, suitable for an inter-hospital transfer.

An employee in the Mid-Ulster Hospital accused United Hospitals Trust of having embarked upon a campaign of disinvestment over a number of years in services at the hospital which had resulted in risks being created. He referred to the inability of the health service to cope and drew attention to Causeway Hospital recently having to divert patients to the Mid-Ulster Hospital.

Other comments made by those present included a drop in standards in health and social care provision over the years, lengthy waits in larger hospital accident and emergency departments, the probability of creating grounds for medical negligence, the consequences of closing accident and emergency at 11.00pm considering the pub culture and the lack of contact by Boards and Trusts with those paying for the health and social care services. Attention was drawn to the large number of churches and schools that are supported in the area and the view expressed that one hospital could be supported. The proposals to reduce services was described as an act of vandalism and the Mid-Ulster Hospital described as the 'jewel in the crown' following a scheme piloted in the intensive care unit and followed by other hospitals.

Mr Creighton thanked members of the public for attending. Comments made would be included in the Council's response to the consultation.

Mr Brown recognised the isolation feared by people west of the Bann and drew attention to the lack of public confidence in ambulance provision and stressed the need for this to be addressed prior to any change in service provision being

agreed. He too felt that by not providing adequate resources services had ultimately become run down and as a result the Trust was addressing this by removing or reducing services.

Mr Nolan queried what had happened to the workforce planning initiative that was to have been in place, Mr Millar spoke of the unhappiness among paramedics regarding what duties they may be expected to undertake and Mrs McEldowney referred to the Steering Group established by Magherafelt and Cookstown District Councils to discuss the proposals.

Mrs McClelland called for direct questions to be asked of United Hospitals Trust in terms of what would be in place if the proposals were accepted, Mrs Morrison commented on how a service run-down in one area impinges on other areas and Mr Millar commented on possible changes in the out-of-hours doctor on call service west of the Bann which would further impact on service provision.

A draft response would be prepared and shared with members for comment.

63/06 **TO CONSIDER AGENDA ITEMS FOR JOINT MEETINGS WITH UNITED HOSPITALS TRUST, CAUSEWAY TRUST AND THE NORTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD**

Members were invited to forward suitable agenda items to the Chief Officer.

64/06 **VISITING**

Visit Reports

Homefirst Community Trust Equipment Centre, Ballymena

The large equipment store in Ballymena has several smaller sub-stores in sectors across the Homefirst Community Trust area. Each year approximately 24,000 pieces of equipment are delivered to some 13,000 clients, which include vulnerable groups such as the elderly, palliative care patients, mental health clients and children with disability/complex health needs. A separate cleansing and inspection unit with a repair and recycling facility is operational within the Store to process all returned equipment in accordance with the Trust Infection Control Policy.

The store is also used to hold a range of different types of incontinence products, which are distributed to clients throughout the Trust and to hold the Trust's archived records.

Mr Millar reported that although space throughout the building was at a premium the visiting team were impressed by the storage facility and hoped that the new IT equipment due to be installed in late summer would enhance the barcode system of tracking items.

The Brook, Coleraine

The Brook Housing Project is operated by Causeway Trust in partnership with Fold Housing Association and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The objectives of the new Brook development include the provision of a range of accommodation and appropriate quality day time therapy for people with dementia, the use of assistive technology to enhance independence and the provision of help to maintain people with dementia in the community for as long as possible.

Being new the visiting team appreciated that there were a few teething problems, however, residents were well cared for and the facility was very impressive.

Ballybrakes Equipment Store, Ballymoney

Consideration of this report was deferred to the June meeting.

65/06 **REPORTS FROM:**

Joint Meeting with Homefirst Community Trust – 27 April 2006

Members had welcomed the opportunity to meet with Homefirst Community Trust, however, felt that perhaps more could have been achieved.

Visit to Regional Acquired Brain Injury Unit at Musgrave Park Hospital – 28 April 2006

A report, prepared by Mr Millar on the Regional Acquired Brain Injury Unit, was distributed to members. Opened in May 2006 patients can be transferred to the Unit as soon as possible after care in an acute hospital. The Unit provides an interdisciplinary rehabilitation programme, on an inpatient and outpatient basis,

for individuals who have suffered an acquired brain injury and aims to reintegrate people within the community setting, after discharge from hospital.

66/06 **CORRESPONDENCE**

The correspondence list had been circulated with the agenda.

Mr Brown and Mr Millar accepted Homefirst Community Trust's invitation to a consultation workshop on its Draft Strategy for Services to Older People – Living Well, Ageing Better to be held on Wednesday 17 May 2006.

Mrs Swain accepted the invitation from EGSA Connection Adults with Learning and Northern Investing for Health Partnership to the launch of the Essential Skills Project to be held on Tuesday 30 May 2006.

Mr Millar commented on the consultation by Disability Action on the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Transportation of Wheelchair Users Draft Policy. He felt that the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service did not have sufficient quantities of the necessary type of vehicles and mentioned that the older vehicles did not have clamping facilities for wheelchairs.

Additional items of correspondence included:

- Invitation from The Royal Hospitals to a series of roadshows on the new Women and Children's Hospital
– Mr Millar to attend the roadshow in Ballymena on Thursday 1 June 2006
- Invitation from the Northern Neighbourhoods Health Action Zone to its 4th Annual Conference on Friday 2 June 2006 – Mr Brown to attend
- Invitation to the launch of the Community Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Newtownabbey on Friday 26 May 2006 – Mrs Swain to attend.

67/06 **OTHER BUSINESS**

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Liaison Group Meeting

Mr Millar informed members that the next meeting of the Ambulance Service Liaison Group would be held on Thursday

27 July 2006. He invited members to advise him of any items they wished to have raised. He voiced concern that on several occasions the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service had advised of their unavailability to attend meetings of the group at the last minute, resulting in the Northern Health and Social Services Board having to cancel the meeting. Members felt this was totally unacceptable and the Board should be making strong representation to the NIAS Chief Executive.

SARS/Pandemic Flu Working Group

Mr Millar informed members that the next meeting of the Northern Health and Social Services Board's SARS/Pandemic Flu Working Group would be held on Monday 5 June 2006. He invited members to advise him of any items they wished to have raised.

Causeway Local Health and Social Care Group Reference Group (Older People)

Mrs Morrison enquired if any meetings of this group had taken place. Mr Graham agreed to speak to Mrs L Johnston.

68/06 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held at 1.30pm on Wednesday 7 June 2006 in the Larne Borough Council area.

The meeting closed at 3.59pm.

Chairman

Secretary

Date